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KERRIGAN'S QUALITY

BY

JANE BARLOW

AUTHOR OF "IRISH IDYLLS," "BOGLAND STUDIES," ETC

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

London

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EXILE AND RESTORATION

The Big House Derelict—An Ould Naygur—Rough Experiences—Lost—A Tardy Rescue—A Single Ticket—Precautions—Halcyon Days—A Friend by the Way

CHAPTER I

EXILE AND RESTORATION

WHEN it became known throughout the neighbourhood that Martin Kerrigan had bought the Big House, dissatisfaction prevailed dispersedly, concentrating itself in the one double and one single row of roofs which form the nucleus of Glenore. It was the unpopular act of an unpopular person. There were obvious reasons why the purchase, by whomsoever effected, should be generally disapproved. The house had stood empty time out of mind; that is to say, only venerable people like old Juggy Caffrey remembered when it used to be now and then occupied by Sir John Hutchinson, the last of his line. Since his death the demesne had lain practically derelict, and to the inhabitants of Glenore had in some measure become what the conveniently situated wreck has been to the castaways of fiction, from Robinson Crusoe downwards. It was not, of course, a quarry for quite such varied and appro-

priate stores; still, its simpler products often came in happily enough. The overgrown shrubberies and groves, for instance, supplied "bits of sticks," one of which sometimes made so good a two men's load that its end had to be let dump down occasionally on the way, while the bearer said, "Och, murder alive! stop a minute there; me back's entirely broke"—and this was no trivial matter in a place where the nearest turf-bog is reached by a long row, not always accomplished without danger. Then a bit of grazin' for th' ould ass, or the little goat, was to be come by very handily just t'other side of the dilapidated boundary wall; and "musha good gracious, sorra the taste of a harm the crathur done except aitin' down the grass that was growin' beyond its own len'th to loss from year's end to year's end."

At first these thrifty trespassers used to be kept warily within probable straying distance of the roadside; but in the course of time their owners grew less circumspect, until beasts were tethered boldly deep down the lawns, and young Joe Molloy and Andy Gallaher once fought wildly on the very steps of the mansion about the pasturage of their respective charges. But old Corney Nolan went further still, for shortly before the sale of the property he planted himself a tidy little patch of potatoes in the slip of ground at the back of the

gate-lodge on the lough-road. This step was admired respectfully by his neighbours, who would no doubt have imitated it, had not circumstances so regrettably altered. As it was, Corney had to ruefully lift his crop, which had done grandly, a little prematurely, for the lilac blossoms were only just appearing when the unwelcome news spread through the village. Seated on the adjacent low wall to watch Corney's digging, neighbours opined that it was divil a much more convenience they'd have the chanst to be gettin' out of th' ould place now Kerrigan had grabbed a hould of it. He was the sort of man 'ud purvint the bits of midges of dancin' through other under his trees, if he could have his own way. And Corney, as he stopped at intervals to shake the crumbling dark mould off his dangling bunches of delicate brown balls, responded, "Ay, bedad, it's himself's the pernicious ould naygur."

If anybody had asked for direct proof of Kerrigan's ould naygurliness, I doubt whether his neighbours would have made many charges more specific than those above quoted, though they perhaps might have mentioned his propensity for sitting "wid niver a word out of him, no more than if he was an ould bog-stump stuck up on end in the corner, lookin' as bitter as sut." But in Glenore, as in some other places, a person's

character depends largely upon his command of countenance and conversational gifts ; and, moreover, even if Kerrigan had not been glum and silent, the fact that he had lived for nearly twenty years in Australia would have tended to make him an object of suspicion, as likely to have "took up wid the idee his own counthry wasn't good enough for him."

This was rather hard lines, since his expatriation had not been by any means of his own choosing. He had gone out lothfully, a dispirited lad of eighteen, in response to a summons from his uncle, who was doing well at sheep-farming, and wanted a subordinate partner. That was a chance not to be let slip, and hence, after vainly going the rounds of the long Kerrigan family, thrust more than half compulsorily upon Martin's acceptance. Apparently, however, he did not turn it to much account. He never got on at all satisfactorily with his uncle, and in a few years parted from him on scarcely cordial terms.

"I'll quit to-morrow," he said one evening, when they stood facing a sultry December sunset, which threw the sheep-shadows in attenuated arches on the dusty grass as the flock swarmed over their illimitable pasture, with here and there a tall, outlandish shape vaulting through them ; for this run was far up the country, in the region of kangaroos.

"More power!" said his uncle, who was also short of speech, and had a sharp-edged temper, whetted, perhaps, by his habit of living on black boiled mutton hung in a bag, and indefinitely stewed tea. And nothing more ever passed between them.

After this Kerrigan had a long spell of rough experiences. His luck was bad, and he learned to believe it so, which made it worse; and nature had equipped him ill for the manner of life he led. Circumstances forced him into situations which could not but abound in wretchedness for a man who was constitutionally lazy and low-spirited, who hated novelty in places and people, and who conjoined a lack of self-sufficiency with an incapacity for finding friends. Long lonely journeys from strange station to station, where temporary jobs offered hard work among unfamiliar surroundings; aimless loafing between whiles in town squalor, with a study of humanity's dregs presented as an employment for his leisure, risky exploring expeditions through doleful wastes, where the blank monotony was only broken when privation and fatigue rising to torture pitch made the boon of "going on and not to die" seem a dubious one, even while struggled for most desperately—these things came into his life, and their passage left in the gallery of his memory some

pictures which he looked at too often for his peace of mind. One in particular continued to draw him with a haunting fascination, and that not merely because it was among the last of the series.

There was the monstrous grey-brown plain, boundless, trackless, almost herbless, blackened here and there by patches of dwarf thorn-tangles, as if by the shadow of a motionless cloud; but not a cloud in all the sky, which the sun, still low, flooded fiercely. Nothing on the horizon except far off a colossal lump of bare crag, grotesquely elephant-like in outline, a sort of dismal landscape jest. Nearer, in the same direction, gleams of water, not beheld elsewhere by the traveller in a parching sequence of days; but here nature had devised another little pleasantry, for the water lay in a salt marsh, and the leaves of the rank growths beside it were white-crusted with brine. This shock of disappointment had perhaps hastened the collapse of the young man, whose dead body, lying between two spinny-tufts in the wide morning glare, was the core and centre of its circumfused desolation. Kerrigan could never see the figure of the live comrade, wayworn, ragged, wild-eyed, standing by in the solitary resourcelessness which is despair's despair; because that wretch was himself. But, on the other hand, he could always

call up—he could not always dismiss—a lurid dissolving view of his own mental experiences throughout this crisis of his fate.

It began with the moment when young Day, who had been coming on more and more slowly since they passed the mocking marsh, stumbled over a stone, and never tried to rise again. "Hold up there," Kerrigan said jocularly, "you've a good way to fall," and he continued to treat the incident from a humorous point of view longer than one might have thought possible. His mouth was so dry that many of his words missed, like the notes of a worn-out barrel-organ, whose handle ever and anon turns dumbly, suppressing whole phrases of the intermittent melody; and this had a droll effect, though I doubt that it would have amused any one who heard him. Then he left off his jokes, and became seriously argumentative. If Day wanted to rest a bit, he had a deal better come on a trifle further to where there might be a screed of shade under the scrub there, didn't he see —yonder, within a stone's throw. He'd no business to be sprawling in the eye of the sun, unless he'd fancy to get up raving with a sunstroke. Righteous indignation came next. Day might please himself, and stick skulking there like a blazing fool, when he knew right well their only chance was to tramp ahead, and try for water behind the

next ridge; but he needn't expect another man to throw his life away waiting for him; by the Lord, no! Concessions, however, followed. He'd step on himself and see after the water—there was some sort of a sign of a hollow away over yonder, and like enough there might be a pool—and he'd bring back a bottle full; anyhow he'd come back, if Day would say whether that was the best plan, or would just promise to stay quiet there till he came. But Day just would not give any such superfluous assurance.

At last he threw up the game, and in rushed the hideous storm of terror, which had been howling wolfishly louder and nearer, expectant of that issue. If Kerrigan had attempted to define its cause he would probably have ascribed it to his sense that there was not a single living creature within a hundred miles of him. For he overlooked the fact that, very high up in the blue, two black smuts represented a pair of pink-necked vultures; he would, I believe, have considered their company better than none. His horror came on him in gusts and paroxysms, and during the lulls he was mostly wondering whether the lad there had had fair play. He thought so, on the whole. Could not be held accountable because Day, for all he stood six foot three, and to look at seemed as fine a chap as you ever clapped eyes

on, was no more fit to knock about in the bush than a kid just beginning to run. It was his own notion to come on this tramp. And he had been let ride the last horse while it could go; and then he had always carried the light pack, and he had got his share, and over and above his share, of the water, as long as there was a drop, and not grudged it either, God knew; ay, he might have had more, and welcome, if he would have taken it. Likewise Kerrigan was quite aware that, had he made a start on his own account a few days ago, and pushed forward at his own pace unhampered, he might now have been safe among places where people live, instead of facing, across a round or two of their careless clocks, the forlornest fate of a castaway.

So there were really small grounds for the feeling of murderous remorse to which these reflections still illogically led. While making them, he sometimes roved off aimlessly to a short distance, and when he looked round was always thrilled by a certainty that Day had moved, and rushed straight back, stumbling and panting, to turn cold in sight of the truth starkly gainsaying his delusion. That would be often followed by a wild outbreak of the terror-tempest, and in the height of one of these he determined to go and drink at the brine-pools, which he could yet see glistening faintly, fore-

shortened into silver threads. It might be less lonesome to die raging mad than in one's right senses. Or he might find fresh water there after all, and then Day could have a good drink, which would soon bring him round. But in that case no time should be lost, and he was running desperately when the sun-blaze seemed to twist about his throat a fiery-knotted cord, which choked him until he fell down headlong into a hollow of booming darkness.

By the time he came to life again the sunshine had bleached into very white moonlight, which was full of strange shapes and shadows. He had been happened upon by a camel-mounted expedition, experimenting in that corner of the enormous desert, and now groping their way back to civilisation in straitened and critical circumstances. However, they did not forbear to revive Kerrigan with muddy malodorous water, the market value of which was just then far higher than that of so much potable gold. As for Johnny Day, only one service could be rendered him, and this they performed despite protest entered by some discomfited croaks and flapping of heavy wings. But a benevolent Chinaman underwent great exertion to keep Kerrigan on the back of his uneasy-paced beast until his journey's end; and the upshot of it all was that after certain nightmare-fever weeks, Kerrigan came to himself in a Ballarat hospital,

lord of his own shaky hands, and of little else besides, his other possessions being mainly a very few dollars, and a small battered leathern writing-case, which had belonged to Johnny Day.

These, however, were soon surprisingly augmented, as about that time his laconic uncle died, much wealthier than any one had supposed, and in a characteristically brief last will and testament, named Martin Kerrigan sole heir, for no particular reason except that it seemed the least troublesome thing to do. Thus it came about that Kerrigan found himself one fine morning walking along a quay in Sydney, a very rich man. Not that he regarded himself from this point of view; what struck him as the great feature in his situation being that he was a man who could now take ship forthwith for the old country, the old life, the old people, and never leave them again. For nearly twenty years he had resolutely kept his thoughts turned out of that impossible channel, and its sudden opening seemed to engulf them all, so that the thousands which had accrued to him impressed him as a sort of glorified steamer-ticket. When he went to book his passage, he almost amused the bored clerk by the unnecessary vehemence of his "Single, sir; single, single, thank the Almighty!" in reply to an ordinary business question. He had quite recovered, yet he was haunted by superstí-

tious forebodings lest he should not live through the long hot days which must pass before his boat sailed, though they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Buying small-sized presents—he had not yet realised that portability now no longer greatly concerned him—for everybody he could think of, proved the most effectual distraction, and they formed the bulk of the baggage with which he went on board at the first moment permitted.

Still, despite all this childish bustle and eagerness, he was not laying up disappointment for himself by imagining impossibilities about his return: he took precautions against that. Meagre letters from home had kept him apprised of such capital events as deaths and marriages, and he knew that time must have wrought other changes. His father and some of his brethren were gone, and the youngest children, who had squeaked "Good-bye, Marty," as the car grated past below their perch atop of the haggard wall on that miserable March morning, were irrecognisable men and women. During these few days Kerrigan looked at his face in the glass oftener than he had done in the course of twenty years, and he saw one which was over-much furrowed and grizzled for the right side of twoscore. The inference which he drew from the reflection was that he must expect to find his mother grown quite old and

white-haired, and to meet in his elder brothers and sisters people who, if you came to consider it, could not be called young. But this was a mere matter of detail compared with the fact that there they were, to be seen and spoken to again, in the white house at the end of Farrell's Loning. Kerrigan thought he knew every inch of that townland, a very green pastoral corner of a northern county, where the countryside is crumpled into soft hillocks and hollows, and where the small fields are divided by tall thick hedges, which throw their shadow halfway across the grass at sunset, when the summer evenings are clear. They are so often misty skied, and there is so often rain on the air, that a hand thrust among a clump of leaves generally comes out wet, and the tree-stems and wall-stones are thickly powdered with pale yellow lichen dust. But a man, he said to himself, might lose his way there for ever and a day without a chance of coming on the horror of a huge glaring wilderness, which haunted his dreams, and sometimes drew him waking into its desolation by the memory of one piteous grave.

And high above this sense of escape, and exuberant still in spite of all the pruning to which he had wisely subjected them, sprang the joyful anticipations summed up in the fact that he would be at home again. His new wealth, with

its vast, hardly tested power of making things pleasant, occurred to him in this connection only as a subordinate though agreeable incident, not by any means to be set on a level with the delight of walking once more up the narrow path along the thick privet hedge, towards the door where his mother and "the lot of them" would meet him saying, "Well, Marty! well, man alive." But with a cautious foresight, which sensitive people acquire in self-defence, he resolved to say nothing about his fortune until after his arrival, so that if he found himself oppressed by melancholy in the presence of household losses and changes, he might shake it off the better through the excitement of announcing the good news. That any credential of the kind could be requisite to ensure him his welcome was a notion which naturally never visited his mind. Accordingly he simply wrote that he was coming home by such and such a steamer, and hoped his letter would find them all in good health, as it left him, thank God! which threw no light upon his financial condition.

The weeks of his homeward voyaging were probably the happiest in his life. He travelled in the steerage, because he was alarmed at the elegance of the cabin for which he had paid, and he had reason to congratulate himself upon

his change of quarters, as among the steerage passengers he found one friendly spirit, a stout, dark-eyed, south-Irish matron, bound for her little house in Mallow with a joy matching his own. "May goodness pity them, the unlucky poor people!" he heard her say one day in a tone of heart-felt commiseration as they passed an outward-bound emigrant ship; and he so thoroughly shared the sentiment that he ventured into discourse with her, and had some of his gruff shyness thawed away by a genial sympathy. Thenceforth Kerrigan might frequently be seen beside Mrs. Mooney's maroon velvet bonnet and comfortable violet and green plaid shawl, and on these occasions the chances were that he was "wearing his hearer" in the praises of Drumclogher Farm, its inmates, and general surroundings. But his good-natured hearer wore well, and had interest, and even advice, forthcoming when consulted about the little presents, which he kept by him, and looked at so often that their neat white wrappings or glazy cardboard boxes grew tumbled and thumb-marked. In fact exposure to the sea air wrought so detrimentally upon an elaborate filagreed frosted silver brooch, which he destined for his youngest sister Maggie, that its tarnished aspect became quite a serious vexation to him, as his vexations went just then.

DRUMCLOGHER HOSPITALITY

The Old Home—Family Affairs—An Awkward Question—More Precautions—A False Alarm—Oranges and Apricots —A Rejected Proposal—An Account Settled

CHAPTER II

DRUMCLOGHER HOSPITALITY

BUT when he walked up that narrow privet-hedged path one bright, brisk-aired, late-September afternoon, nobody was at the door, which stood closed. It was opened for him by a stupid, strange slip of a girl, who shut him into the stuffy front parlour, saying vaguely that she would "get somebody to him." This somebody, however, was so long in appearing that Kerrigan had time to think heart-sickly of what might have intervened since the date of his last home letter, now several months old. The shadow thus conjured up blurred away all the pleasure of meeting his brother Tom, and Tom's wife, who at last came in, and it made him hurry over his greetings to the question he scarcely dared ask, "And how's mother? I suppose I'll be seeing her presently?"

"Why, then, haven't you heard tell?" said Tom.

"She was well the time Maggie wrote," Martin said, defiantly.

"Och and well enough she is, for that matter, if that was all. I thought somebody was after writin' you word. She's got married again—there's for you—and me poor father not a twelvemonth in his grave, this minute; not till after Christmas!"

"Married again? Mother married! That's great!" said Martin, laughing, while about his ears clattered down the ruin of the house where he was to have spent much of his time in being very kind to her, and getting her everything she liked that money could buy.

"You may call it so. And the fellow she's took—a man by the name of Carter—used to be comin' here about cattle grazin'. A big, fat lout, fit for nothin' but fuddlin' himself with whiskey. Owns all manner of property out in Queensland, if you're to believe his account; I don't. But anyway it's there they packed off to, last month; like enough your boats crossed one another somewhere."

"Well, the divil's in it," said Martin.

"*Carter* was after the bit of money father left in her own control," Tom said, explanatorily; "a thing he'd no right to have done, and that's the thanks he got for it—in six months."

"And herself with a great big red poppy cocked on top of her bonnet," inserted Mrs. Tom, "fit to flare the sight out of your eyes."

"But as for what bewitched an old woman of her time of life," Tom went on, "to go make such a laughing-stock of herself, I'm not offerin' an opinion."

"You might then," said his wife, "for often enough, before there was any talk of such a thing happenin', I've told you to mark my words your mother was gettin' too fond of a drop; and once a body takes to that, there's no foolery need surprise you. Why, my good gracious, the very last time they were in this room, there was neither of the pair of them that I wouldn't have said had had something stronger than egg-broth, and it not ten o'clock in the mornin'. That was the reason of my sayin', if you noticed, the key'd got lost, when she passed a remark about the decanter of sherry-wine."

There followed a long, painful pause, during which Kerrigan felt as if something worse than the devil were in it. When he broke it by inquiries after another brother, there seemed to be a certain fitness in the reply that Arthur had gone to the bad altogether this good while back, though his progress thither had not formed a

sharply outlined incident such as are chronicled in one's correspondence.

Then Mrs. Tom said: "And where are you stoppin' now, Martin?"

"Oh, last night I slept at Drogheda," he said, with a confused start, "and then—and then I came on here."

"Oh, we could put him up," said Tom, less thorough than his wife in carrying out their preconcerted policy of letting Martin know at once that if he chose to lose his chances, and quarrel with his well-to-do relations, and come trapesing back, the Lord could tell why, or what he thought he'd get by it, it was his own affair, but he needn't suppose he was going to live on *them*.

"In course, if it's only for *a night or two*," Mrs. Tom said, with emphasis, "a couple of the boys might sleep in the loft. It's as full of draughts as it can hold, but there's no other way I can manage."

Kerrigan sat miserably mumbling something about being sorry to put them out that much. He would have gone away at once had not a glamour, lingering from his imaginations on the Pacific, bewildered him and puzzled his will, as he stared at his mother's old sampler, still hanging glazed and faded on its accustomed nail. Besides that he could not at the moment think of any

one place to set out for more than another. Also he had some wish to see his sister Maggie, and they told him that she would not come home till late that night. So he said to himself that things might be pleasanter, somehow, in the morning. They were not, however, except in so far that Maggie, tall and twenty-three, had still the same clear grey eyes as when she was four years old, and seemed glad to see him in a shy, suppressed sort of way. For the rest, little Francy choked and sneezed at breakfast, whereupon his mother said pointedly that it was enough to give him his death, sleeping out in the loft with a blast through it like a winnowing machine. It was a Saint's day, and she had not been able to forbear putting on her best purple merino; but she considered it expedient to counteract this symptom of prosperity by bidding the children not crumble and waste their bread, which the dear knew it was not so easy to fill their mouths with those times. She remarked, too, that as butter was ten prices, she would not break the second pat that morning —unless Martin would take another bit, which he declined to do. Tom had apparently forgotten all the old household jokes and adventures which Martin recollected most clearly, and when reminded how they had said or done this or that, would only indifferently daresay that they might.

His air was resolutely abstracted, and curt his speech.

But when the womankind and children had gone to Mass, which naturally disposes men to talk about business matters, he enlarged at great length upon the unsatisfactory state of his own affairs. It appeared that what with the sum he had paid for the interest in the lease when taking on the farm from his mother, and what with the sight of money going after Maggie next month into her convent at Belfast, where she was to profess, and what with the general badness of agricultural prospects, Mr. Tom Kerrigan could not tell the day or the hour when he might not be making a composition of so much in the pound, and the next thing he knew, he would have a wife and half a dozen children starving on his hands. Having thus conducted his family to the door of the workhouse, with an ostentatious parade, which was a little overdone, he turned his attention to his brother's more immediate concerns.

"And what have you a notion of doin' now, Martin?" he said. "You made no great things of it out there, I should suppose."

"Oh, I'll rub along one way or the other," said Martin. He felt a faint, dreary satisfaction at the thought that his brother was taking all these pre-

cautions against a false alarm. As for the news of his own riches, he had not the heart to produce them. That whole story was now like a flower just dropped in pieces—all there still, but no longer worth looking at ; and Tom had helped to shake off the petals.

The vagueness of Martin's reply rather quickened Tom's apprehensions. "There's California now," he said ; "people have great talk of the fruit-growing business. I believe there's money in it. Had they any such thing out where you were ?"

"Some," said Martin.

"I should suppose," said Tom, "that a man with no capital to speak of might get employment at it ready enough, if he had experience. You've been knockin' around a goodish bit ?"

"Nigh twenty year it is," said Martin.

"A man was tellin' me only the other day," said Tom, "of a party goin' out there from Queenstown next week—Tuesday, I think he said. Uncommon raisonable the fares were, he said. Some of them had been askin' him to join. A fine chance, he said it was, for any one it might suit. From Queenstown next week. I couldn't swear now whether it's Tuesday or Wednesday.

"I landed Thursday evenin', and here's Saturday—not two days clear," Martin said, meditatively.

But Tom misconstrued the import of those calculations, and said encouragingly, "You'd run down there in plenty of time, if that was all. And anyway, you could be makin' inquiries. I wouldn't wonder if it was worth your while."

"I wouldn't wonder," said Martin.

He had suddenly quite determined to leave Drumclogher by that night's train; not that he harboured the ghost of a plan respecting California, or any other place on the surface of the blank, unmeaning, doleful earth. One, however, occurred to him an hour or so later, when he looked out of his window and saw his sister Maggie pacing up and down in the little garden strip at the back of the house. He watched her for a while, and then went out and joined her. Maggie was reading a little old book of devotions, which made her feel as if she were back again in the long, elm-shaded nun's walk at Saint Mary's Convent, where, however, she would not have encountered anything resembling Martin, in his loud-patterned check suit and flaming red tie, bought because he remembered that his mother had liked him to wear a smart one on Sundays. He had no time to spend on preliminaries, and came to the point at once, so that Maggie had scarcely broken off in the middle of her psalm, when he was saying, "Look here, Maggie; will I tell you a bit of a

"MAGGIE WAS READING A LITTLE OLD BOOK OF DEVOTION"—*Page* 28.

secret? D'you know, I've come into a lot of money—a thundering lot. Old Uncle Francis left me every rap he'd got, and he'd made his pile something like. But what I was thinking, Maggie, is that, if you haven't altogether made up your mind to this nun business, you'd maybe come along and keep house for me—anywhere you might fancy; it's all one. And as for spending, by Jingo! you might carry on like a digger with a big nugget—you might so. And supposin' there was trouble with those convent people about you breakin' your contract, or whatever it is, why, I could stump up any amount; so never you mind that. I'll make it all square with whoever bosses the concern. What would you say to it, Maggie? I've a notion you and I'd get on together first-rate, and in the matter of money, as I tell you, we could live like fighting cocks."

Kerrigan knew full well that he was blurting out uncouthly and roughly what he wanted to put forcibly and persuasively, but the knowledge helped him as little as it has done many other people in like case, and he ended with a conviction that he had ruined his own cause, which gives a crude bitterness to the fruit of frustration and failure. Yet, in reality, eloquence would have here availed him nothing. It would merely have added to his sister's disconcertion by rendering less pre-

posterously impracticable this alternative scheme suddenly held up between her and her securely mapped-out future. As it was, the incongruity had a reassuring glare. How should there be any link between her destiny and that of this gaunt, harsh-featured stranger, whose grizzled, black-bearded visage had only now and then a passing look which reminded her dimly of some long while ago, as his voice jarred familiar with foreign tones in his half-unintelligible, slangy talk about his money. Maggie cared rather less for money than he did himself, and was heartily weary of hearing people discourse about how much and how little of it they had. Could Martin have known, he might as hopefully have offered her one of the glowing marigold discs out of the border at her feet in exchange for her long-cherished dream of a life nestled in among quiet, cloistered gardens, and grey walls that niched a tiny white cell, stainless and still as the chamber in a spiny horse-chestnut burr. Any proposal which seemed to seriously menace the realisation of that dream would have struck her indeed with sore dismay, and even now she was so obviously shocked and startled that Martin felt almost as if he had by inadventure thrown a stone near some small, wild creature, whom he did not mean to frighten. Before she had answered,

he had read in her scared eyes the fate of his last attempt to pick up one strand of the old severed life across the chasm of years.

"Ah! Martin, don't talk that way. How could I do such a thing? It would be just turning back at the gate of heaven," said Maggie, with sincere solemnity, having at the moment a very clear vision of her gentle, motherly Novice Mistress waiting there to bid her welcome, of spacious hall and corridor, where the dimmest recesses held the light and incense of tall lilies, of the serene-countenanced sisters chanting in their choir, flecked with ruby and amethyst under the jewelled window—all seen through the shimmer of a mystical bridal veil. It was no wonder that talk about living like fighting cocks sounded to her scarcely like human speech.

"Well, well, never mind about it then, Maggie girl," said Martin; "it was no more than an idee I took up, remembering you the jolly sort of little kid you used to be in the old days. You needn't let on I ever mentioned the matter; they'd maybe bother you about it. And I won't say either but that you may be right to step in there, if you think you've got the chance; anyway, we come across plenty of the other place outside here, as far as I've sampled it. But I'm off by the next train, so I'll say good-bye. And here's a bit of a sort of a

shawl-brooch contrivance I got for some one else —she fancied them large-sized, I know. It's a general view of the town and harbour of Sydney, done in silver work. I don't know would you be let wear such a thing, but perhaps it might come in handy for pinning on your wings with—nuns are a kind of walking angel, as I understand."

He went off jocosely, as suited his witticism; but Maggie, though on the whole relieved at his departure, watched his exit with a remorseful twinge, and for the first time glanced at his request from his own point of view. There was something in his walk, as he disappeared among the yellowing currant bushes, that reminded her of her father; and she wished, uneasily, that Tom and Ellen had not been so stiff, and that she herself had not allowed them to silence her by their glum dumbness when she would have responded to his essays at conversation. However, she consoled herself a little by resolving that she would pray for him a great deal.

Martin presently left the farm with every intention of returning thither no more. He neither announced nor denied that he was going *viâ* Queenstown to California, and his brother and sister-in-law displayed a polite reserve about explicitly questioning him on his plans, though from hints which they let fall, it was evident that

they were strongly impressed with the advantages of emigration, especially when directed to the culture of oranges and apricots. Just before he started he gave a bit of crumpled paper to little sneezing Francy, and the child afterwards exhibited it to his father, observing, "He said it was for board and lodgin'." But Tom Kerrigan snapped it away angrily, saying that it was only a piece of foolery, and he thrust it far back into a drawer which he seldom opened—he would have liked to put it in the fire. It was a ten-pound note.

AT GLENORE

At Fault Again -Slender Resources—The Lough Farm Library—Neighbourly Criticism—Censure Rash—A Sunlit Lawn—"Cock Him Up"

CHAPTER III

AT GLENORE

MARTIN KERRIGAN resumed his travels almost as aimlessly as if he had been a tuft of thistle-down setting out on a breeze—a black, dreary gust, rather, ranging over thorny and desolate places. What led to his alighting at Glenore was a recollection, one of the oldest he had, of a room perched up in a little thatched gable, where, after he had gone to bed, boughs used to rustle and creak close against the window. This room was in a small farmhouse, a mile or so from the village, which the Kerrigans had occupied for a short time in Martin's earliest days. He now made up his mind that the house had surely been demolished, or at least the trees cut down, and his impression was that the sight of this would help to cure him of his painful propensity for reminiscences. Therefore he resolved to go and take a look at it; after that he could turn his mind to something else—goodness knew what.

But at Glenore he found his forecastings once more at fault. The house stood there still, untenanted on the green strip between lough-end and sea; and the clump of elms beside it did not seem to have lost one gold-crested bough in all those thirty odd autumns. In fact, the second series of disappointments and disillusionings which Martin courted did not befall him, for the reason that his remembrance of the place rested chiefly upon salient landscape features, wherein a returning subject of Kings Heber and Heremon would probably have noticed little alteration. The long grassy-shored lough, with one crescent-shaped creek curving its silver horn into a cloud of pines, the hills' nearest ridge of soft moss-green and dove-colour, loomed over by deep purple peaks and shoulders; the river racing down the steep glen in creamy swirls round about flat-ledged, straight-sided boulders—these were all mistily familiar to him when he saw them again, though they had till then quite slipped out of his mind—an experience which gives us a sense of possessing more than we know. Nor had these any strong association for him with missing face and voice, to make their unchanged aspect a cheating husk of the past, such as he had turned away from lothfully among the better-remembered fields and lanes of his northern home. On the whole, it appeared to him that he

had rather less reason for leaving the place than he had for coming thither; and hence it followed, naturally enough, that his car went jiggeting back empty to Ardnacreagh, while he installed himself as tenant in the little brown-hooded lough farm-house with its few acres appertaining.

Here his existence soon fell into a groove of the sort which disposes one who fares along it to feel that the most obvious amendment of the scheme of things would be fewer hours in the day, and fewer minutes in the hour. Kerrigan had always been slenderly provided with the means of effecting this improvement for himself, and his access of wealth now gave him little or no assistance. He had the disregard for all manner of creature comforts which enforced privation often teaches, when it is accepted uncompromisingly with no tacit pledging of one's self to make up for it the first time one gets the chance. The comforts to which he had looked forward more or less hopefully as merely postponed had been, he found, deferred out of existence. The Widow Dempsey, who cooked for him, reported that he "ran through his bit of food unnaturally permiscuous, and had no more opinion about it than the ould pot it might ha' been boilin' in"; and he had soberly witnessed so much drinking that he was little likely to oil the clogged wheels of Time out of the whiskey bottle.

Blue-gyring tobacco smoke was a curtain he had never been able to draw effectually between his perceptions and his surroundings, since the distraction afforded by clumsily keeping his pipe alight, and wondering why he did so, produced scarcely a haze to soften the hard outline of obtrusive facts. He unfolded, I believe, his most serviceable screen with the crackling sheets of his newspaper, which he read very thoroughly always, on wet days even to the advertisements. Once having followed his forefinger down about half a yard of an anniversary article on Lord Byron, he was so much struck by a stanza given as an extract that he went to Ardnacreagh, and bought a copy of the Poems, which he remembered seeing in the stationer-linendraper's window. But he must needs plod wearily through barren tracts of rhetoric and bombast in his quest after verses of the quality which had appealed to him, and Kerrigan read with a dogged conscientiousness preclusive of skipping; consequently, he did not very often take up his brilliant scarlet volume. In long spells of bad weather he pored much over a dusty bundle of *Illustrated London News*, which had somehow become a property of the little farm parlour; but he recked nothing of the recurrent fresh, glossy, pictorial pages wherewithal he might have kept his floor littered ankle-deep from week's end to

week's end. And he was similarly unenlightened with regard to other minor resources against monotony, which the mere fringes and edges of his fortune could have swept into his possession. As it was, the gaudy Byron remained his sole luxury, and the one point whereon he showed any tendency to profuse expenditure was the erection about his small territory of the inhospitable wired palings, with which he baffled the incursions of errant mottled-faced sheep and noisy gossoons.

This last indication of an unneighbourly exclusiveness helped to darken the complexion of people's conjectures whenever the magnitude and the sources of Kerrigan's wealth were under discussion. It was admitted on all sides that he must be a warm man, since he could afford to pay rent for a bit of land out of which he did not attempt to get anything, never doing a stroke of work himself except just streeling around with his two hands in his pockets; while as for Natty Losty, that he was by way of keeping about the place, "sure an ould hay-spider leggin' it over the fields would make as much differ as what all that misfortnit ould bein' did be able for. Bedad now, to to see him standin' up there, makin' scrawms like an ould hin scrapin' for wireworm, and consaitin' he was hoein' turnips." I believe Mrs. Fay, who came of an imaginative family, was the original

promulgator of the theory that Kerrigan had come by his wealth through "some quare villainy entirely, and couldn't make up his mind whether the Ould Lad would be apter to have a grab at him if he kep' a hould of the money, or set about spendin' it"; a state of painful indecision which would account for his black looks and naygurly unsociable ways. At that hearing, her cousin Moggy said corroboratively, "she'd often enough seen him when, accordin' to the onplisant gob he had on him, you might bet a week's wages he was after doin' murdher on some one"; a remark which the Widow Dempsey, who, being Natty Losty's daughter, had a double interest in Kerrigan's respectability, took up as a personal matter, saying resentfully, "Murdher be choked. It's aisy bettin' what you haven't got. Sure the poor man's under no obligation to go about grinnin' like a dog wid a bone in his mouth onless he has some manner of raison."

"He may have his own throubles," suggested Mrs. Molly Nolan.

"Musha, good gracious," said Mrs. Mack, "vinegar'd have a right to be chape, if ivery body who'd got *thim* was to look fit to turn a pailful of new milk over it."

"His father was a dacint, quite man, the time I remimber him in it," said old Mack, the deaf

carpenter, among whose chips and shavings this colloquy took place, "and the wife was a fine figure of a woman. Cross she was too, if anythin' went agin' her. I mind makin' her a stool that didn't give satisfaction in the legs for some notion she had, and I wasn't to get a ha'penny for it at all, och no! not a brass bawbee, she stood me out. So ould Kerrigan stepped round and ped me surruptuous. But she wasn't too bad, mind you, all the while."

Kerrigan, however, concerned himself very little about his neighbours and their opinion of himself and his family. If he had been asked to define his and their respective attitudes, he would have said that *he* let them alone, and *they* let him alone, and the more they did the better he was pleased. They were nothing to him, and he took a curious sort of pride in keeping them so. He had come home full of interest and affection and eagerly generous intentions, but the channels into which they should have run were hopelessly blocked up, and he made it a point of loyalty towards his past to ignore the possibility of any others. Since he could not have what he had set his heart upon, he would not disparage it by contenting himself with a second best. There is a soul of magnanimity in such perverseness. So he shut down with a stubborn spring a lid of indifferent ignorance upon his

sympathies, and said to himself that he wasn't going to bother his head about "the pack of them," by which he understood mankind, minus Martin Kerrigan. He said, too, that they were all the one thing—a criticism of humanity which is as luminous in its effect as the smudging of one's finger over a line of wet script.

His experiences of life in Australia made it the easier for him to pursue this course, inasmuch as out there he had long been accustomed to see want of the means of subsistence occur, save under accidental circumstances, only among the hopeless good-for-noughts of the community. Hence the marks of great poverty stamped visibly all over Glenore merely gave him an impression than its inhabitants were a lazy, thriftless, dissipated folk, to thank for their own plight, however uncomfortable that might be. The poor little cabin-rows, with their shaggy roofs and rough-rifted walls, huddling away from the wind-sweep beneath weather-beaten banks, or looking forlornly ready to sink for shelter underground; the children playing in wispy rags along the road; their hollow-cheeked elders, ragged also, standing by passive, content presumably with their harm—these obvious things all seemed to strengthen that impression until it hardened into an article of belief, which he was not sufficiently concerned

about to consider very deeply. If he had even superficially examined its grounds, difficulties might have arisen. For the painful tillage of stony places, and the patient portage of heavy burdens, young and old plodding the long miles under creels of dark sods or dripping weed, and the hazarding of lives on wild waters for the sake of a raft-load of turf or sixpenn'orth of fish, would point irresistibly to the conclusion that a reason must be sought otherwhere than in easy-going acquiescence. Closer observation would have brought forward further witness in the signs of a reaching after order and amenity whenever the dead weight of sheer penury is lifted, be it never so little ; the border of whitewashed stones leading to the low, dark doorway, the screed of muslin curtain across the deep-set pane, the high-coloured picture on the smoke-stained wall, and the drooping plant in the broken jam-pot, all enter their protest against the crushing out of sight of honest labour's blossom, which is beauty. Kerrigan heeded it no whit, being by nature somewhat unobservant of trifles. By nature, too, his disposition was such that, even with the best will in the world to make or admit approaches, it proved something of a stumbling-block ; but now, when he deliberately erected it into a barrier between himself and his kind, it speedily walled him about with an im-

penetrability which left him strangely blind and deaf to his surroundings.

His life on these terms continued to slip by with no outward event of any importance until he had passed nearly twelve months at Glenore. Then one morning he saw advertised in his newspaper the sale of Linmore, otherwise the Big House—a circumstance which made no perceptible impression upon him, as he listlessly learned from the descriptive particulars what very remarkable advantages were attached to this property. But later on that day he happened to walk along a bright stretch of road until it climbed away from the lapping lough-rim on the right hand, and on the left ran by a low wall, beyond which the grey old mansion-house was visible among the wide lawns, where forest trees stood still in groups apart. It was near sunset, and as Kerrigan leaned his elbows on the wall, the light streamed slantingly over his head, and flung all the shadows far across the grass in the same direction that his looks went. The rich gold-on-green of their sunlit interspaces had the radiance of two jewels fused in one flame; for the season was the threshold of autumn, when western rays fall hued like wine and honey, and the summer's many rustling showers had kept the sward as freshly vivid as on May Day. Further off a fiery rose glow tremulously

touched and crept about the ashen-grey stone of the chimney-stacks and gables.

Kerrigan began to wonder vaguely who would buy the old place ; he felt somehow that he would not like to see strangers walking in the lawn there. And just then the thought struck him that he himself could buy it, if he chose, three or four times over, trees and sunshine and all. Probably his wish to avert the possible stranger worked more towards the developing of this stray thought into a definite resolve than did any pleasure he took in the play of lights and shadows ; for, being low-spirited and unenergetic, the motives of his actions were most frequently negative. Still, after the purchase had been effected, he seemed fond of surveying his domain from that point of view over the low wall, and he visited it on most fine evenings.

The transaction, we have seen, was unfavourably regarded by Kerrigan's neighbours, and it caused the utterance of many a "cock him up," and other ejaculations, conveying a sense that somebody has taken too much upon himself. However, when in course of time it was observed that he erected no more fences, and seemed unaware of the straying beasts—in short, took no further steps towards having, entering into, and enjoying the demesne, they left off saying "cock him up," except on

special occasions. And the Widow Dempsey always averred that he never had e'er a notion at all of living up there himself: "Sure the poor man 'ud have more wit than to go evenin' himself that way wid Quality."

MACK'S SHED

An Accident—Dr. Magee's Patients—Housekeeping at the Lough Farm—Barney Mack on Cyclists—Kerrigan Launches Out—Widow Dempsey's Patronage—Chances—A Bit of Good Luck

CHAPTER IV

MACK'S SHED

ONE day, about a year after Martin Kerrigan had bought the Big House, the Widow Dempsey came into the stuffy little parlour, where her employer was sitting behind a newspaper, and said, "Mr. Kerrigan, there's a quare upset a bit down the road."

"What's that?" said Kerrigan, with more interest than he showed. He had read all the leading articles through twice.

"One of them onnathural little yokes that rowl about wild wid big wheels is after whirreling a young gentleman off of itself below at the corner. Lyin' for dead in the gripe he is, Jack Mack was tellin' me, and the whole nation, you may say, doin' their endeavours to lift him."

By the time that Kerrigan reached the scene of the accident the endeavours of the nation had succeeded in extricating from the ditch the unlucky wheelman, who lay looking very long and limp on

the tangled grass beside it. He was said to be all broke to geomethry, and entirely desthroyed, not a spark of life left in him, the crathur, whatever; and as Kerrigan had, no doubt, gathered experience from his foreign sojournings, a gap in the semi-circle of bystanders was made to give him scope for endorsing this melancholy diagnosis. But it was observed that he held back for a moment, "lookin' like a horse wid a notion of shyin' at somethin'," said reporters of the affair, and it seemed even chances whether he would not just take himself off without expressing any opinion, which would have been unneighbourly, though in him noways surprising. However, after a slight hesitation, he came forward, and said he thought there was no very serious harm done, but that the doctor should be summoned, and the young gentleman carried up to the farm. The young gentleman's brother, a lad his junior by some years, was infinitely grateful for this relief, and vented his feelings in profuse thanks for the offer of accommodation. Whereupon the group dissolved, mainly in the wake of an improvised ambulance, beside which walked Kerrigan, listening with a morose scowl to assurances that he was awfully good. Only soft-hearted Molly Nolan sat on the bank and cried, still holding to the belief that the poor young lad, with his lovely black head of hair, like

her own Jimmy's, had met his death away from his people in a strange place. And young Paddy Mack hovered round the distorted frame of the wrecked bicycle, eyeing it with a curiosity tempered by awe, and whetted by desire.

Glenore is a place where events are made the most of for conversational purposes, and the arrival and detention there of the strangers supplied raw material which lent itself to a thrifty spinning out. It still formed the basis of the talk, a few evenings later, in and about Mack the carpenter's shed. This favourite gossiping ground stands with open front, sustained only by three unsymmetrical pillars of very crooked tree-stems, against the end wall of the Macks' cabin. Theirs is the last in the row which cowers under a steep bank at right angles to what we call the main street of Glenore. Rich growths of russet and emerald moss, with much waving grass and embroideries of delicate buff and lilac snapdragons and toadflax, and other high-flying blossoms, have wrought their several thatches into one homogeneous fabric, but seldom patched with darns of fresh gold. A lough curves up close to their doors, in accordance with a saying we have to the effect that on our countryside, if you happen to have a spare stone in your hand, it will be by a very odd chance when you cannot sling it into a lough without going a step further or backer—a

true enough statement generally, though the lough may be, strictly speaking, the sea, a fact which, amid this intricate labyrinth of water and land, is sometimes made apparent to sight only by a trail of rust-coloured weed.

No dwellers in this row were perhaps better liked than the Macks, whose full style and title, never used in every-day life, was McEvoy. Certainly no others owned a place so conveniently situated for just looking into as the shed, where a neighbour was always welcome to a handful of curly shavings. In the daytime two or three children of the smallest crawling size would commonly be rustling among them, complacent and self-absorbed, though apt to kick and yell if they accidentally crept across one another's track.

On the evening I speak of, a larger gathering than usual had looked in at the Macks', because the doctor from Ardnacreagh was visiting the young gentleman up at Kerrigan's, and would pass by there going home. "Macks'" was hence a convenient post of vantage for such of the neighbours as aimed at waylaying the man of science on their own, or, more commonly, on other persons' behalf. These schemers hung watchfully about the door, with at least as many hopes and anxieties among them as there were shawled or hooded heads, all of them desperately confident that the sovereign

remedy to meet each case was somewhere corked up in a bottle, if "himself" would but hit on the right one. Some thought this less likely to happen than the rest did; nobody disbelieved in the existence of the bottle. The others, who took a merely disinterested interest in Dr. Magee's visit, stood inside, and talked with their feet among the shavings.

Curious and conflicting reports prevailed at this time in Glenore touching the nature of the injuries sustained by the young gentleman, and Dr. Magee was held responsible for some bulletins which argued him of quite singular accomplishments in descriptive anatomy and surgical pathology. They all, however, agreed in their conclusion sufficiently to be summed up in the sense that: Though the patient was after experiencing a severe toss, and had got shook up wid a heavy sog, he'd have the use of his bad knee right enough in a while, if he kep' himself quiet; but 'twould be as much as the life of his limb was worth if he offered to move out of where he was for the next couple of weeks, anyway. Dr. Magee, presently driving by, and falling into the ambush laid for him, now substantially reiterated that opinion, before he was carried off to prescribe for ould Moggy Flynn, who didn't be gettin' her health this somewhile back, the crathur, whatever ailed her; and for Thady Losty,

more specifically afflicted with a woeful cough you could hear a mile o' ground, like an ould cow chokin' herself over a hard turnip.

Mrs. Mack, who sat knitting in a corner, then said, "Kerrigan's is a poor place enough for Quality to be laid up in, and himself none too agreeable at the back of that."

"An ould naygur," Mrs. Gallaher said, chiefly from force of habit.

"Mrs. Dempsey sez as often as not he'll have nothin' cookin' in the house from one week's end to the other on'y the pot of pitaties. On a Saturday he'll sometimes let her get a bit of bacon for the dinner, if he happens to have the change handy in his pocket, or else he'll bid her to never mind it. Crool disappointed she and the ould man do be of their chanst of the bit over," said Mrs. Mack.

"Sure now, I did be takin' note of that meself," said Hugh Brady, the lame man who worked on the roads, and who had called in about a shovel handle, "for as long as Kavanaghs were in it, I'd often get the greatest smell at all of bacon fryin', and onions wid it, when I would be scrapin' up round the near corner. Rael powerful it was; bedad it seemed in a manner as good as somethin' along wid me could savin's of pitaties, when I'd be chumpin' them under the bank. It's surprisin' now

the company a smell of anythin' cookin' is to one of a day when the road's could and lonesome. But up there these times, you couldn't tell there was food or fire widin ten mile of you, no more than if they were bastes of the field settin' up to be keepin' house."

"Mrs. Dempsey let's on he's not able to afford any better," said Mrs. Carroll, "but that's past belief."

"Phiuch," said Mrs. Biddy Gallaher, loftily, "you needn't go too much by what *she* sez. It 'ud be a quare thing if a man that rinted the Lough Farm, forby ownin' the Big House, was findin' himself at a loss for the price of a pound of bacon."

"Not but what there's a quareness too," said Hugh Brady, "in seein' him slingein' about wid a down-look on him as if he was reckonin' the stones he stipped over, and he by way of well-to-do and nothin' ailin' him. It's quare both sides you look at it, like a through-cracked plate."

"Belike," said Molly Nolan, "somethin's took all the people he had belongin' to him, and it's discouraged the crathur is, bein' left to himself that way, poor or rich. Goodness guide me, but if I had the iligantest dinner cooked, and nobody to be aitin' it along wid me, 'tis apt I'd be to go sling it in the pig's ould trough: faith I would so—that's the notion I have."

"Sure and I did ax him what was gone wid his father, one day he passed me by," said Hugh Brady, "for I mind them all well enough bein' here. And sez he, '*He's dead*'—just that way, all in a word, as if he was dumpin' down somethin' out of his hand wid no feelin' in it. So I gave a rest to axin' after the others; there used to be a good few of them."

"Well, they'll have to put up wid him, anyhow—the strange Quality, I mane," said Mrs. Mack, "and if he's ugly-tempered, it's no fau't of theirs. Lastewise the young young gentleman's as plisant-spoken as you could wish. A couple of days ago he seen Paddy here standin' star-gazin' at the little smashed yoke laned up agin the wall, and he tould him he was welcome to take it, and do anythin' he could conthrive wid it. Sure the bosthoon's been that took up tinkerin' at it ever since you might think he was bewitched."

"I was somethin' surprised," said her brother-in-law, Barney Mack, "to see Quality skytin' about on them machines at all at all. For the on'y other one of them I ever beheld, och presarve us alive, the thing that was on it, wid its stripy coateen, and its yeller shoes, you could aisy percaive it had the opinion iligance was no name for it; but Quality—musha moyah! 'Twas a day last summer, Long McGovern and meself were thrampin' it to Skreen,

and we come upon this conthrivance rowlin' itself up a rise in the road beside Lough Granlagh, when McGovern and I were a bit above, slippin' down a sheep-walk. Well, so happen Crazy Christy was on the road too that time, jiggin' along as contint as a fiddler, and be raison of the sun bein' scaldin' hot he'd got a young plantation of big fern leaves stuck round the brim of his caubeen, and an ould red handkercher wisped over the crown, that might look a thrifle off the common. Anyway the spalpeen wid the yoke settled to guffaw, and give him impidence goin' along, and there was Christy stumpin' the fastest he could, wid his stick, and his stiff leg, and houldin' on disprit by one hand to his caubeen. And prisintly the spalpeen ups and tips it off of the ould crathur's head right into the deep water. So wid that McGovern let one bawl at it to lave annoyin' the dacint man, and the minute it spied the two of us steppin' down the hill, up it frog-hopped atop of the big wheel, and away wid it along the road ; you might as well run after a strake of smoke. Sure now that was just the awkwardness of McGovern, not to be keepin' aisy wid his roars till we had it safe. 'Twould ha' done one a benefit to be givin' itself and its yoke a couple of streels through the lough."

"Howsome'er, Quality this is, sure enough," said Mrs. Nolan, "and high up too. Andy was tellin'

me that, accordin' to what all there did be on a letter come for them last night, they're somethin' of the nature of lords."

"Ah! good evenin' to you, Mrs. Dempsey," said Mrs. Mack. "I was near tripping you up that time wid me fut."

The haste which had made the Widow Dempsey stumble was partly put on for effect. She was at this time enjoying a situation the dignities and privileges of which had for her the newest gloss of unfamiliarity. Since the arrival of Kerrigan's guests she had become a dispenser of gossip, and even, as will appear, a bestower of patronage, to an extent which gave her a social status unparalleled in her experience. For she had been a Losty, and the Losty family was not thought much of in Glenore. Indeed, when her husband, Felix Dempsey, died shortly after his marriage, some of the neighbours said, epigrammatically, that the poor man had done the next best thing he could. So that if her sudden elevation made her head swim a little, and somewhat distorted her point of view she was not without excuse. On the present occasion, she saw fit to enter in an ostentatious fuss, ejaculating, "Chuckens—and new milk be the quart—and fresh eggs—and as for the tay and the lump sugar—well tubbe sure."

"What ails you then at all, woman?" Mrs. Gallaher said, repressively.

"Och the day I'm after havin' wid them all," said Mrs. Dempsey, in a tone of ecstatic distraction. "Sure the cart came be the other road, or else you'd have had a chanst yourself to see the load of things we were gettin' in from the town—aisy chairs, and carpets, and curtains; troth now, you niver beheld the aquil of the grandeur they've unrowled into; you might think you were treadin' on the heavens above. And the hampers of wine —bedad, I'd be tired tellin' you the half of it."

"And whose notion was it to be sendin' for such?" said Mrs. Mack. "The Quality's, belike?"

"Musha not at all. Why, Mr. Kerrigan was in there himself orderin' everythin' yisterday. I saw him in the mornin' one time standin' in the passage between the two doors, lookin' about him like a strayed gander, and sez he, 'There's a power of things a-wantin' around,' sez he; and sure enough, a power he got when he went to do it. Quality'd nothin' to say to it, and, mind you, I didn't let on. For when I was spreadin' of the new flowery carpet in Sir Ben's room, sez he to me, 'I'm afeard we're givin' you a dale of throuble.' So I tould him we'd just been gettin' our own carpets bet and shook, and that

was why he might ha' noticed they weren't laid afore. And as for the aisy chairs, I said they'd all been away gettin' their broken rowlers mended, and a few odd lies like that. There's no call to have people supposin' we don't know what dacincy is. And more-betoken, that reminds me I was to be fetchin' Mack himself, or one of the lads, to come and regulate the curtains, for there's some manner of quare clothes-pegs like wantin' to them, that I miscomprehind the fixin' of. Och and the chuckens—sure me head's fairly moidhered wid everythin'. Mrs. Gallaher, ma'am, you may lave me up a couple more of yours at the house, and I'll give you tinpince apiece for them. They're not worth it, but begorrah these times when himself puts his hand in his pocket, 'tis little he seems to care how much he takes out."

"And bedad then, I'll be doin' no such a thing," said Biddy Gallaher, who, being quite as proud as she was poor, which is saying a bold word, extravagantly resented the Widow Dempsey's patronage. "I hope he'll get his health till he finds me thrampin' after his tinpinces, worth it or no."

"Plase yourself and you'll plase me," rejoined Mrs. Dempsey, defiant, yet taken aback.

"I've a grand couple, ma'am, for eighteenpence

the pair," said a quavering voice, which proceeded from Juggy Caffrey, a forlorn-looking little old woman, who had never had very much pride to put in her pocket, and whose crippled husband and invalid daughter would have constrained her to keep it there, no matter how inconveniently large its quantity. "Great they are," she said, "and I could be bringin' them to you ready plucked and all."

But Mrs. Dempsey was naturally anxious to pass on the snub, so she replied tartly, "I won't throuble your ould hins, Mrs. Caffrey. Troth, it's divil a much of the crathurs you'd have left to be talkin' about wanst the feathers was off of them. Set them up with eighteenpence." And old Juggy subsided, disappointed and rebuffed.

"What was that you called the young gentleman?" inquired Mrs. Carroll, one of those persons who act as pointsmen to conversation, and shunt it off lines which seem to threaten asperities. "Is it a 'Sir' he has to his name?"

"Ay, bedad is it—Sir Benjamin O'Connor, the same as his father before him. Sure they're great people. The letters they do have comin' and goin' do be a sight to behould wid the Sirs on them, and the Esquires, and the Ladies. Her Ladyship herself, that's stepmother to the two young gentle-

men, lives up above in Dublin, wid a fine family of childer, but she doesn't be on'y wakely this good while, and that's why she couldn't come here to Sir Ben. And he'll be lonesome enough now that Mr. Leopold's off wid himself to-morra. Takin' to the soldierin' he is, so he was tellin' me father yisterday, and he's goin' up to London to be readin'."

"And what at all has the soldierin' to say to his readin' then?" demanded Mrs. Gallaher, who always received Mrs. Dempsey's statements in a critical spirit.

Mrs. Dempsey had not the vaguest idea, but held it incumbent upon her to be explanatory, and she answered with considerable presence of mind, "Why, sure he knows right well he won't get the time for e'er such a thing wanst he's in the army, so he's apt to do it while he has the chance. And then," she went on, enjoying the sensation that her reasons grew more substantial under her handling, like a well-stirred pot of thickening porridge, "he'll be wishful, in coorse, to have what larnin' he can about the histories, and the battles, and the wars, so as he may have some sort of notion how he'll like it all when he's in it. Wouldn't that, now, be the way of it, Hughey?"

"What 'ud ail him to not like it," said Hugh

Brady, leaning on his mended shovel-handle, "and he goin' among the Captains and Ginerals? 'Tisn't as if he'd be doin' the stumpin' along the roads in rows like a thing set thrampin' be machinery, the way the lads were I seen route-marchin' beyond Ballycrone. Up on horseback he'll be. Not that thrampin's any great hardship, so long as a feller can set his fut straight under him; but there's a good few can't. Musha, Quality's little idee, wid their horses and cars and all manner, of the divilment does be in it when you're short of the right use of your ould limbs, and you bound to git about one way or the other." Hugh spoke with a vivid picture in his mind of wearisome road-stretches, lengthened and roughened for him by his rheumatic limp.

"But it's a serious matter entirely for Quality to not like anythin' they have," said Mrs. Mack. "A poor body, now, that hasn't got his likin's, he can aisy understand how he might be better off, but when Quality's dissatisfied in themselves, sure they know there's nothin' more to be had. They've come to the end of everythin' in this world."

"I dunno but I'd liefer not ha' finished up all me chances that way," said Mrs. Gallaher.

"Quare fantigues they have for sartin to be sloppin' about wid the jugs and cans of could

wather," said the Widow Dempsey, wont to look at things in the concrete, "sure it's kilt I am carryin' them up the biggest I can find in it. But Mr. Kerrigan sez I may get in a girl to give me a help wid the work—sixpence a day and her males."

"Ah, now, there's a fine chance for one of Stephen Losty's daughters," said Mrs. Nolan, with a half-envious thought of her own.

"'Deed then, and it is not," said Mrs. Dempsey; "sorra the one of Stephen Losty's baggages will I have doin's or dalins wid, not if he was twinty brothers, after the sauce that big impident lump of a Lizzy up and gave me father the last time he went to their place. Rael annoyed she had the poor ould man. So sez I to meself, 'Bejabers, me hussy, you've done for yourself wid me for good and all, as maybe you'll have raison to know some of these fine days,' I sez."

"And, bedad, you on'y said very right," Mrs. Gallaher pronounced, amid assenting murmurs.

"But och, murdheration," continued Mrs. Dempsey, overtaken by an access of unaffected flurry, "here I am forgettin' all this while I had a right to be doin' me messages at Hanlon's, and the flour and salt a-wantin' agin the supper—sure I must run like the win' of ligtnin'."

This gust of hurry fluttered a bit of good luck

in old Juggy Caffrey's direction, for the widow continued, "Maybe you might as well be lavin' up them chuckens after all, Mrs. Caffrey, ma'am, for niver an instiant have I to see about e'er another, bags of bones or no."

The old woman accepted the commission gleefully, and set out to execute it with the haste which is thwarted at every step. Her age was almost fourscore. As she hobbled along towards the clear rose arch of the sunset, she was considering that she would have time to hurry on with her pennies, and get a roll of white bread, which Norah, just now unusually ill, might be persuaded to taste. "Anyway, himself 'ud be glad of a bit, the crathur, the day does be long to him, and he wants somethin' to hearten him up like," she said to herself, hopefully, trudging her best, bent and tremulous, down the road, where pretty Juggy Lynch, self-engrossed and often dissatisfied withal, had fared light-footed sixty short years ago.

QUALITY ARRIVES

Kerrigan secures a Tenant—The Decline of Glenore—Supper at the Caffreys'—Mrs. Carroll Reports—Her Ladyship and her Maid—Miss Merle—Matchmaking—Quality's Troubles—Held Responsible

CHAPTER V

QUALITY ARRIVES

ONE evening in the course of that week Kerrigan was paying his customary visit to his invalided guest, still immured in the little farm parlour. Sir Ben's rather dismal day, spent for the most part in the company of the dusty *Illustrated London Newses*, had left him in the frame of mind which, among familiar scenes and society, tends to shortness of temper, but which commonly superinduces lowness of spirits when one's surroundings are strange as well as unattractive. He was glad when his host looked in as usual about dusk. Kerrigan would not come at any other hour, lest Sir Ben should think his presence encroaching and intrusive; while Sir Ben did not invite it, supposing Kerrigan to be busy with his farm work, and ill able to spare the time—misapprehensions which added some unnecessary tedium to their days. Not that the discourse which passed between them was either

very lively or abundant, as they were both of them shy and given to wool-gathering, and conversation under such circumstances is subject to breaks and catches, no matter how carefully its thread may be spun.

On this occasion one of these had occurred, and Kerrigan had got up to throw more sods into the white ashes and dim, pink embers of the grate, when he must have fallen into some irrelevant reverie, for as he stood in the middle of his new green rug, he suddenly muttered half aloud, "And not so much as a drop of muddy water to give him." The connection of ideas again was not apparent on the surface, as a moment afterwards he said to Sir Ben, "I suppose now, sir, you haven't any of your family out in those parts—in Australia?"

"None at all," said Sir Ben, "but I sometimes have an idea of going out there myself, or maybe to New Zealand."

"You shouldn't take up with any such idea," Kerrigan said in a tone bordering upon peremptoriness.

"Then you didn't think much of it?" said Sir Ben.

"There are awful places in that country," said Kerrigan, "blasted awful places—places a man might be wishful to never have come within sight

of, let alone bein' set down by himself in the middle of it. You get dreamin' it all in the night." He broke off with a start, as if he were wakening out of some such uncomfortable vision. He hardly knew what had brought a misery, half the globe and many long months distant, vividly before his inward eye.

Sir Ben looked on a little surprised at this solemn vehemence in Kerrigan, who had hitherto seemed a rather imperturbable person. "Oh, well," he said, "I hadn't thought of anything very adventurous or uncivilised; not much chance of that, considering I should probably have half a dozen children of assorted sizes along with me. The fact is that my stepmother has to winter in a mild climate, and then some doctors recommended a long sea voyage; but she'd never face it. I'd meant to run over to France before the winter, and look about in the south; there are old châteaux, I believe, sometimes to be had cheap in unfashionable places. But now that I'm tied by the leg for an indefinite time, I don't exactly see how they're going to manage." Sir Ben looked harassed, as three-and-twenty, possessed of no great faculty for practical affairs, legitimately may, when confronted with a complicated domestic problem. But he added as an after-thought, lest he should seem to disparage

his quarters, "I couldn't be more comfortable than I am here, and I like the look of this part of the country uncommonly."

"It's warm enough with us too," said Kerrigan, "summer and winter. You can tell by that we've no frost to speak of." He pointed through the window to a thick hedge of fuchsia, which still showed a dull scarlet glow among its dark green. "Last year we hadn't as much snow as 'ud make a fleece for an old wether. I wonder now, would you think of trying a bit of a place I have in the neighbourhood standing empty?"

"We want a lot of room," Sir Ben said, hardly taking the proposal seriously.

"For that matter the house 'ud hold a regiment," said Kerrigan, "and as for rent, faith, 'twould be a robbery to ask more than just any trifle considerin' the advantages of having fires kept in the rooms, and folks about to interfere with the rats."

It was thus unpremeditatedly that the negotiations began, which had the result of erelong supplying Glenore with another large piece of news. If Kerrigan's purchase of the Big House had been an unpopular measure, the step which he now took went far to counteract its effects; for almost unanimous gratification went through the village in the wake of a rumour that he was "about puttin' Quality in it." The per-

manent presence of Quality in the place seemed, for various reasons, a desirable thing. Only the older inhabitants, as I have said, recollected such a state of affairs, and they naturally looked back upon it as a constituent part of a bygone prosperity. There could be no doubt that Glenore had come down in the world since the Big House had stood tenantless, though the cause of this decline was rather to seek in the blighted fields of black famine years, and on board coffin ships, and in agents' and lawyers' offices. These were responsible for the unroofing of whole crumbling cabin-rows, now flourished over by nettles and docks, as for the shutting up of the more durable stone clergy house beside the little church on the shore, and the conversion of the parish, ecclesiastically considered, into a mere chapel of ease, priestless, and ministered to on occasion by clergy from Skreen or Ardnacreagh. Fathers Behan or Linders driving over hurriedly on a car to say Mass or hear confessions, were held but a sorry substitute for old Father Finucane, whose good-humoured face had been familiar all through the district, and who, as Corney Nolan said, "had a pleasant word to give anybody he met, forby knowin' what people every mother's son of them came of, from the first day there was a talk of

them in the counthryside." The same circumstances had led to the closing of Mr. Mackay's miscellaneous shop in the village, which left what remained of Glenore in dependence upon Hanlon's unassuming establishment, and had deflected from it the course of the mail car, once the source of a daily bustle and sensation, now pitifully dwindled into the erractic arrivals of Andy Nolan with a meagre post-bag. Still, the withdrawal of Quality having formed one feature in these retrograde movements, gave some grounds for the expectations that their return would be attended by further progress, and Glenore drew such auguries with a good deal of confidence when it became known that the Quality which was to be put in it were the belongings of Kerrigan's guest. Sir Ben, who now began to limp down the boreen, and sit among the boulders on the beach, was regarded with marked favour, the most moderate eulogists describing him as "pleasant and quite," while Mrs. Fay committed herself to the characteristically high-flown sentiment that he was "the iligantest figure of a young man she'd ever set eyes on, and sorra the Jukes' daughter widin the four says 'ud be a thraneen too good for him, if they were his aquil at all." Mrs. Fay was sorting out bad potatoes for her pig when she thus passed judgment upon the daughters of Jukes.

Norah Caffrey, old Juggy's bedridden daughter, met with a serious disappointment on the evening of the day that Quality arrived at the Big House. Her sister-in-law, who was doing a job of cleaning-up there, had promised to slip in at the Caffreys' on her way home, and tell them all about the new-comers. But the report of a disaster befallen her week's wash obliged Matty to hasten back "as if the Ould One himself was after her," and hence her short skirts and fluttering shawl whisked passed their door without a pause. For some minutes Norah clung to the theory that Matty might only have an errand somewhere close by, and would return presently gossip-laden ; but then she heard the patter of the trotting feet round the corner of the lane towards the lough, and knew she must abandon this hope. The sound seemed to spoil all the flavour of the potato which she had been eating for her supper, and she laid it down, saying it was so dry-like she scarce thought she could swally any more. "Thry a sup of the buttermilk wid it then, childy dear," old Juggy said, anxiously, "it's lovely and sweet yet" ; and the childy tried it to little purpose, for she had counted the whole day through upon her sister-in-law's visit, and the philosophic mind, which her fifty years should have brought, appeared as unconsolatory as the sour buttermilk. So that under

the Caffreys' thatch the October gloaming begun to spin its cobwebby shadows about two woebegone faces. Old Caffrey was neutrally asleep.

It was wonderful how quickly things brightened up when Mrs. Carroll came suddenly bustling in, and said sure she was disturbin' them at their suppers, and she wouldn't stay. Mrs. Carroll's conversational powers were highly reputed, because her observation of things was both kindly and keen, which made her narratives at once pleasant-flavoured and satisfyingly full in detail.

"I slipped in," she now explained, when she had been urgently bidden welcome, "be raison of thinkin' Norah might maybe fancy the little square cake was at the bottom of the paper bag one of the young Quality threw flutterin' away, and they drivin' up to the gate above. There's a whole one in it, forby a good few broken bits," she said, producing the flimsy wrappage, "but if I was to go bringin' it home wid me, sure 'twouldn't be no more than just a weeny crumb a-piece among the childer, tantalisin' the crathurs wid the taste of nothin' at all. Thry it, Norah honey."

"So then you was seein' Kerrigan's Quality comin' in, ma'am?" Mrs. Caffrey said, well pleased, as Norah began to crumble the flaky biscuit.

"Troth I did so; carryin' up a half-dozen eggs to the house I was when the whole of them druv

by—a shut carr'age, and Pether O'Brien's car, and a cartload of big black boxes the size of a young turf-stack. Och, woman dear, they'd surprise anybody. You might be considerin' the day's len'th before you could think of enough things in your mind to make the full of them, let alone gettin' them to put in."

"And what sort of Quality would they be at all? I've a recollection of two of the ladies spakin' to me on the road one day in ould Sir John's time. Axin' their ways somewhere they were, but I was that took aback, and they talkin' quare and quick, wid a sort of high gobble-gobble in it, all I done was to be dippin' me curtseys up and down, till one of them sez, 'Sure she doesn't understand on'y Irish,' and the other sez, 'Isn't that a pity now? and she a pretty-lookin' crathur'—sure I remimber it every word past belief, considerin' that time I was a slip of a girl scarce the age of poor Norah here."

"Well, as for her Ladyship herself, I wouldn't say she had a very grand appearance on her whatever. 'Deed now, I'll tell you what the black thing she'd got streelin' down to her feet made me think of; 'twas like the gowns I'd see on the people say-bathin' out at Salthill, when I did be in Galway. And a great wisp of a black veil hangin' out of her bonnet—if it hadn't been for that I'd

had a fine view of her, for she took a sort of wakeness gettin' out of the carr'age, and sittin' she was a good bit on the lowest flight of the doorsteps afore they persuaded her up into the house. Bedad, 'twas aisy to persaive be the way Sir Ben had wid her that he's a kind feelin' heart and sinsible and quite too. But Kerrigan himself was skytin' about like a scared rabbit lookin' for a glass of wather. I'd scarce ha' thought he'd ha' put himself about that much for anybody."

"Me brother was tellin' us," said Norah, "that Mr. Kerrigan did be oncommon set on puttin' this Quality in it, so belike he wouldn't be wishful anythin' 'ud happen them, and they just comin' to the place."

"And is herself all the ladies they have?" inquired her mother.

"All, on'y the childer; there's two of them young ladies. But her Ladyship's maid — Mrs. Lawson I heard them callin' her—the iligance of her is somethin'. Shiny silk in strips all up and down her skirt, and a coateen on her wid fringes and little balls like danglin' all round it, and a big gold chain glimpsin' through the front openin' of it. And as for the gazebo of pink flowers wid the tufty feathers growin' out of them in her bonnet, you never saw its match. A respectable poor woman she looked to be too. And the childer are

gay little crathurs. Micky Duggan, that druv them on the car, said they had him fairly deminted ; for he'd got the apperhension on his mind that they might chance to be fallin' off on him. So when they persaived that he was onaisy, they took to lettin' on they were about tumblin' every perch of the road they passed over, till he came near screwin' his neck-joint loose wid squintin' back to see was the whole of them to the fore—and he knowin' right well that nothin' 'ud better plase his ould rogue of a mare than to be landin' them in the ditch, if she thought he had his eye off of her, and a terrible time he experienced, poor man. Howane'er, never a harm they intinded wid it all ; och no, fine childer they are, and apt to be a credit to any place."

By the time that Glenore had its first opportunity for a general discussion of Kerrigan's Quality, which was after Mass on the following Sunday, the Big House had received another inmate, whose aspect needed no explanatory hypothesis to recommend it, being as happily appropriate to the situation as the blossom to its spray, whereas her Ladyship's shortcomings in elegance and grandeur had to be accounted for by various charitable considerations, such as that she was a widdy woman ; that she looked to be oncommon delicate ; and that she was belike entirely took up wid religion,

so as to have ne'er a thought for fine clothes or anythin' else at all. For on the Friday before, Sir Ben had driven home from Ardnacreagh with a companion who created an excellent impression as she was borne along our broad street. It was, no doubt, in some sense a one-sided impression, since beholders on the left had merely a glimpse of a knot of clear sunny hair, the brighter for a black velvet and grey fur setting ; still, that harmonised well enough with the nearer view accorded to their neighbours over the way. Everybody, more or less, concurred in old Corney Nolan's opinion, formed under exceptionally favouring circumstances, as he sat to glean the last ripe rays of the sunset on the wide-topped wall by his door : "Sure I'd great observation of her," he said, "while the driver did be mendin' th' ould collar wid a bit of string. Ay, bedad, 'tis a purty face she has of her own ; but if she hadn't itself, she's got that agreeable sort of look on her you wouldn't be wishin' her anyways diff'rint to what she was. And holds up her bit of a head as if we were all the grandest in the counthry, and she was proud to be comin' among us. Ay, sure, I seen her right well."

"I question now will she be very apt to stay long in it," said Molly Nolan. "I was thinkin' she didn't look too well contínted the time she was passin' us. Far out over the say she was

star-gazin', as if she was thryin' to count the sheep on Inisharm—somethin' discouraged like. And sure 'twould be but nathural, and she an iligant young lady thravelled to a place at the back of God-speed, maybe, after lavin' plenty of her frinds behind her."

"She was laughin' hearty enough then when I saw her," said Paddy Mack.

"And small blame to her for that same," a good-natured friend remarked blandly, "if she'd happint to notice the quare toss you were after gettin' off the little wheel-yoke you've the notion you can set runnin'—much you will. I was wonderin' what took you to be makin' a show of yourself that-a-way wid Quality just comin' up the road. And you wid straws enough to thatch a rick stickin' to your ould rags where you rowled agin the bank. Troth, the owls 'ud laugh, let alone a young lady."

"Never you mind him, Paddy," Biddy Gallaher said, in reply to his look of disconcertion, "'twasn't any rowlin' of yours she laughed at—and wouldn't. 'Twas her little villin of a dog that let on to be for swallyin' a whole row of geese, till th' ould gander let one hob-gobble at him, and wid that he was full pelt after the car yawpin' to be took up in the greatest consternation whatever; 'twas that diverted her. 'Pick him up, Ben,' sez she to

his Honour, and sez he, 'Well, now, isn't the baste a regular little polthroon and a humbug?' And sez she, "Oh, no matter, supposin' he is.' So Sir Ben lep off his side of the car—he's more than a trifle stiff yet—and handed the crathur up."

The only point upon which there at first existed some divergence of opinion was as to who the young lady might be. When it became known that she was Miss Merle Clariston, her Ladyship's niece, "nothing at all to the O'Connors," it seemed obvious to Glenore that she and Sir Ben must be sweethearts. Nobody with the meanest capacity for putting two and two together could doubt the fitness of such an arrangement. It is true that Mrs. Lawson, the fountain-head of particulars relating to the family, had heard no talk of anything of the kind; that was merely discountable discreetness. On other matters she enlarged, indeed, with no more reticence than sufficed to leave an impressive background of "an' I woulds." Against this, for instance, she painted in glowing colours the former magnificence of the O'Connors, who not very long since had been overtaken by some pecuniary disaster, which likewise adversely affected Miss Merle's fortunes. Till up to that time the horses they kept, and the livery servants, were past telling, and as for so much as looking at an old ramshackle place like Linmore House, Mrs.

Lawson's good gracious, 'twas little they'd have thought of such a thing. In her opinion those losses broke old Sir Benjamin's heart; anyhow, he was taken very suddenly just about then, and her Ladyship had never been the better for the shock from that good day to this. And as for the young master, it was a pity to see the way he'd lost his spirits. That wasn't only by reason of his father, but by the misfortune of his cousin, that he'd always been great with, getting drowned almost the same minute of time, one might say, crossing over to Dublin. Yes, indeed, drowned he was off the mail-boat one stormy night; a splendid young man, and the favourite of all beholders.

There was something in this last affliction which appealed forcibly to the neighbours' sympathy. Few among the women who heard it but bethought them of what sighed and surged a stone's throw from their back walls, with, hauled up by its margin, the more or less crazy crafts in which their hearts had tossed on wild nights and days at seasons of fishing or fetching turf. Drowning is a word to conjure up a shiver with in such places as Glenore, and the fact that it had played a part in the past history of Kerrigan's Quality seemed a bond of union. But while the losses and troubles, and touches of romance, which were related or imagined, deepened the general interest felt in the

new-comers, along with it grew a disposition to hold Kerrigan himself strictly responsible for the well-being of his tenants. In short, the vague disapproval with which he had hitherto been regarded changed gradually into a better defined feeling that the community should keep an eye on him, and see to his doing his duty by the "Quality he had put in it."

RUMOUR

From Merle's Window—An Alarming Discovery—Merle's Correspondence—In Haythen Print—A Foolish Thought—An Unwelcome Invitation—A Day of Misfortunes—Mrs. Lawson's News—Premature Arrangement

CHAPTER VI

RUMOUR

PEOPLE who look out for the first time from the back windows of Linmore House, experience something of a shock, the view before them is so unexpectedly wild. For the park-like meadows and closely latticed avenues which lead to the door, give no hint of how abruptly all that greenery will end, cut off within a bow-shot by a curving sea-arm, thrust inland like a shimmering steely blade, perpetually grinding itself against walls of high and sombre cliffs. Even in calm weather their black-mouthed caverns and recesses are white with swirling foam, which the gulls seem to scatter on poised wings as they swoop about the rocks. Their cries come plaintively across the water, and mingle with the household sounds and voices. Looking to the left, the cliffs swell up into a long-sloped purple and russet mountain, behind a fold of which lies the bog whence Glenore fetches its turf; and trending round the extreme point of the inlet spreads a dark wet morass, rimmed

here and there with silvery sandhills, waved over by grey-green bent, and pricked through by many-hued sea-holly.

This seascape had almost startled Merle Clariston on the evening of her arrival, when she had drawn up her blind, expecting to disclose grassy lawns and rustling tree-clumps; but it had long since become negligibly familiar to her by the April morning when she stood at her window watching Sir Ben make his way across a plot of unshorn buttercups and daisies towards a lilac sunbonnet, which appeared among a jungle of sow-thistle under the glowing west wall. It belonged to Molly Nolan, who had been weeding in the garden for the last few days. "And glad I do be to git the job," she had told Merle, "for himself's been out of work this great while, and not apt to git any till the macker'l come in—bad cess to them. It's wishin' I am that every one of them was choked wid his own backbone, whenever I remember the bottom of our ould boat, that's as thick as a sieve wid holes."

This morning the blue water blinked cheerily through gaps in the dense yew hedges, that intersected and partially bounded the garden, and the shrill twitter of many indwelling finches seemed keeping time with a sort of cymbal-like clash to the rhythmical twinkle and bicker of the ripples.

But care is not to be so lightly warned off any one's premises, and Mrs. Nolan's thoughts often went to the bottom of her husband's leaky boat, as she wrestled with the milky stalks and matted fibres.

Merle knew that Sir Ben was asking Molly, who lived near the Fays, whether their strayed car-horse had returned, for he had an errand to Ardnacreagh. The fact was that his stepmother had this morning dismayed herself, and disturbed her household by an alarming discovery. She had found out that she was breathing through her wrong throat, a phenomenon from the continuance of which she apprehended the gravest consequences. Accordingly Sir Ben was setting forth, as had often happened, to procure medical advice, in a mood of semi-compunctious impatience, which gave him a disagreeable sense of being at once weak-minded and hard-hearted. Molly scrambled up stiffly from her weeding, and said she knew the Fays' horse was come home, for she noticed him grazin' in their field goin' by ; he was on'y after takin' a bit of a stravade along down the beach, wid some of the cattle, and she made no manner of doubt that his Honour would be proudly welcome to the loan of him. So his Honour went to see about it, and thus missed a visit from Kerrigan, who was on his way up to the house.

Kerrigan's errand was caused by an interview which he had had overnight with young Andy Nolan, at this time letter-carrier between Ardnacreagh and Glenore. He had sought an audience at what we consider an unreasonably late hour, and on being admitted had solemnly handed to Kerrigan a square envelope with very deep black borders. "That," he said, "is what's after comin' for Miss Merle along wid the other letters this mornin'."

"And why the mischief didn't you deliver it, instead of bringing it here where it doesn't belong?" Kerrigan demanded, pertinently enough.

"Musha, and is it wid them mournin' marks on it?" said Andy, pointing to the black edges. "And she lookin' out for some partic'lar letter ever since she come to the place, and meetin' me most days as far as the lough gate, and further sometimes?"

"How do you know what she's lookin' out for?" said Kerrigan.

"Right enough I know whatever it is, she didn't git it yet, or she wouldn't be axin', 'Is that all you have this mornin', Andy?' every time I hand them out to her. 'Deed, it's not often there's anythin' comes for her at all; an odd letter now and agin, and some Thursdays there does be a quare little newspaper like, wid haythin print on it—French, Mrs. Gibbs at the office sez it is." (The postal

authorities of the district show a commendable diligence in taking stock of all that passes through their hands.) "So when I saw the black affair you've got there comin' for her, thinks I to meself it had the apparence on it of houldin' some bad ould news or other, and I hadn't the heart in me to go givin' it to her. But when I took it home wid me, me mother and the rest of them were of the opinion I had a right to bring it up to you, and let you be regulatin' it the best way you can, or else I had as good a mind as ever was to just fling it back of the dyke, and no more talk about it."

"You're a cool hand at it, bedad," said Kerrigan, sternly, "but I can tell you one thing there's very apt to be no more talk about, and that is you carryin' the mails, if this is the way you serve your letters."

The emoluments of Andy's office would hardly have kept him in brogues, had he been so extravagant as to wear them habitually on his long tramps; still, its loss appeared a serious matter to him. The threat, however, did not lead him to modify his attitude. "Mails or no mails," he said, "I've no call to be annoyin' her wid misfortins and deaths, and divil a bit of me will for man or stick. Long sorry I'd be to have the bringin' her of any such a hijis-lookin' thing"—he glared vindictively

at the letter which Kerrigan had flung down on the table before him—"begorra I would so. Take it or lave it, accordin' as you may considher, but you needn't go for to say it's any doin' of mine."

Andy stalked out with an air of indignant superiority, which made Kerrigan feel himself somehow in the wrong. And hence his errand to the Big House on the following morning.

By this time a sturdy growth of liking had sprung up between him and Sir Ben, and if the hours which they spent in what their neighbours called "colloguin'" had been deducted from their occupations, gaps of dreary leisure would have resulted on either side. But Merle, who only knew their landlord by sight, and was privately unprepossessed by his hard-featured face in its grizzled whisker frill, found herself rather at a loss for conversation, when he had finished explaining about the letter, which to his relief seemed to be one of no direful import. He had met her in the garden, where she was gathering a great wild bouquet, which might, she hoped, beguile her aunt of a few dolorous fancies; but as in answer to a remark about a clump of daffodils, he replied, "Indeed they're grand little choolips," she concluded that his tastes need not be sought in the direction of horticulture.

"I believe you have travelled a great deal, Mr.

"INDEED, THEY'RE GRAND LITTLE CHOOLIPS."—*Page* 94.

Kerrigan?" she said, diverging towards a more promising topic.

"I was a long while out of this country," he replied.

"And I suppose you meet all sorts of people out where you were—Americans and Russians and Germans?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, there might be plenty such," Kerrigan assented rather vaguely, having been accustomed to lump all nationalities that came in his way under the category "furrin," without troubling himself about any more exact ethnographical classification.

"Did you ever happen to meet any Greeks?" Merle inquired, point blank. She had of late years fallen into the habit of putting this question to new acquaintances, even when they were persons by no means likely to answer it in the affirmative; and some people opined that she did so with a view to airing her own knowledge of Greece, where she had once spent a memorable twelvemonth.

"I don't call any of that persuasion to mind," said Kerrigan. Just then he suddenly bethought him of Andy's statement about the newspapers with "haythen" print, and this was why he continued, "I daresay now, you have an understanding of the German language, Miss Merle?" Miss Merle said she had, and he unfolded his purpose:

"Because there's a bit of paper I have at home, a sort of a letter like, that belonged to a poor fellow I knew, and it's written in some outlandish fist I can't make head or tail of. I showed it once to a man, and he said 'twas German writing, but he couldn't make an offer at reading it any better than myself. And it's a peculiar circumstance too, for Johnny Day was no more a German——"

"Who did you say?" Merle stood up with a great start, and the tuft of wallflower, which she had stooped over, went to seed unmolested on its stalk.

"Johnny Day; that was the name of a lad I chummed with one time out in Australia—he that had the paper I mentioned. And what I was thinking was that I might make so free as to ask you to look at it some time, and see if there's anything in it at all, for I've been often wishful I could tell. The other man had a notion 'twas some description of poetry, but I question did he know a ha'porth about it. I could bring it up to you any time that was convenient."

"Do," said Merle, who for some reason was calling herself a fool—a fool—as she twisted the ends off her hollow oozing daffodil stalks; "I should be very glad to try and make it out for you."

With that they parted at the ivy-arched gate into the tangled shrubberies, and the deciphering

of Johnny Day's strange characters ceased for the time being to occupy their minds.

In Merle's case it was overlaid by the immediate necessity for luring the two youngest children from a precarious perch on the top of the rickety greenhouse stage, which quaked agonisingly as they strove in an ill-timed scuffle. They climbed down eventually at opposite angles on the structure, Louis describing his senior Betty as a vulgar little beast, while Betty did betray a certain want of finish in her manners by observing as she made a more nimble descent, "If I was a great big fat fool with short legs, that had to be helped off the high steps, *I'd* hold my tongue." After this Merle was at leisure to consider the contents of her black-edged letter, which, albeit not of the tragical nature foreboded by Andy, were unpleasant enough in their own way. For they comprised a peremptory invitation, or rather injunction, from her other guardian to spend the coming summer with his family, who alarmed her, at a fashionable English watering-place, which she detested, and she was thus obliged to foresee herself stranded wearily on glaring esplanades, or wishing the long afternoons away in clacking tea-scented drawing-rooms.

"I daresay they mean well," said Merle, disconsolately talking over her prospects, on the steps of the skeleton greenhouse; "but why can't they

let me be? I hate going away from you all, and just when Leo will have his leave, too. Besides that, Aunt Etta really wants somebody to look after her, and brighten her up."

"Of course she does," said Sir Ben, just back from Ardnacreagh, and cast down not a little by Merle's unexpected news, "though I'm afraid that's not very lively work for you."

"I believe I rather hate liveliness," said Merle. "Do you know, when I see all those people parading about in their hideous fine clothes, I sometimes feel the same sort of hankering that a great mischievous schoolboy might have to turn an immense garden hose on them for a while so that they would be obliged to leave off gabbling and giggling, and go home quietly to get dried."

"It's a pity they don't know what your sentiments are," said Sir Ben, "for in that case they might think it safer to keep the channel between them."

"I wish they did then," said Merle. "It's lucky that Aunt Etta has you at home, Ben, or she would be very forlorn."

"But you see, Merle," said Sir Ben, "I must presently look out for some kind of occupation. I can't stay here kicking my heels indefinitely, and, in fact, I ought to have set about something long ago." It was remarkable how clear this

conviction had become to him within the last few minutes. Indeed, its coincidence with Merle's announcement made him suspect himself of having played an impostor's part, in so far as he had been wont to think of himself as sacrificing his own inclinations for his family's behoof, in spending an idle winter. He now felt conscious of a possibly less disinterested motive. But he was not aware that Merle's frankly expressed regrets formed the strongest element in the chagrin which had seized him. They were so unmistakably just as much as she said and no more, and the quantity though far from inconsiderable, did not satisfy him. In short, the Big House was out of spirits, and the more so since Lady O'Connor had for the time being plunged into a slough of valetudinarian despond to an unusual depth, whence even Dr. Magee's string of scientific assurances hardly availed to extricate her. Rose Gallaher, who helped to wait at dinner, reported that "Quality seemed very *quite*, and had scarce a word out of them from the soup goin' in to the little round jam cakes; Miss Merle had only just crumbled hers up on her plate. Belike the doctor had a mighty indifferent opinion of her Ladyship."

This being a day of misfortunes to the household, Rose's remark became the cause of a domestic difference, as it was overheard and

resented by Mrs. Lawson, who requested her to keep her tongue off of her betters, and not be talking of what she knew nothing about, which naturally led to retorts more or less discourteous, wherein Rose and her champions had so decidedly the best of it that Mrs. Lawson retired in heightened dissatisfaction with her situation and surroundings.

It was partly a touch of ensuing spleen, and partly a hopeful wish, that made her say to Mrs. Hanlon, of whom she bought some hairpins on the next morning, "I sha'n't be troubling you much oftener, ma'am. I don't expect any of us will be here over Easter. The air, in my opinion, doesn't suit her Ladyship at all, it's that permeated with damp."

Mrs. Hanlon's round, care-puckered face looked out with real concern from between two dangling bunches of delft mugs and tin cans. "'Deed, then, that same'll be as poor a case for Glenore as a wet week in harvest," she said, and the sentiment was echoed by all her customers, who, over and above their purchases, received the information that Kerrigan's Quality were quitting. As her husband at the bar dispensed the tidings gratis with equal liberality, it spread through the village as rapidly as a windy sea-fog drifts past the headlands of our bay. But before sunset it had

developed so clear and stable an outline that the time and order of the O'Connors' going had been determined with considerable precision. Opinions, however, were divided as to whether Miss Merle would probably drive in the carriage or on the car, and whether Hanlon's or Dan Joyce's horse would be hired for the occasion. Mrs. Gallaher said that the childer would travel a deal safer with some one to keep an eye on their figurandying, and Dan Joyce himself said that anybody who was after seeing the work they had putting Hanlon's ugly-tempered baste between the shafts 'ud be apt to lave the driving of him to people who had an odd couple or so of spare necks to get broken.

AN UNSATISFACTORY LANDLORD

Regrets—Sea-sorrows—The Glenore Fishing Fleet—Patching Up—Speculations—Suggested Improvements—A Snub—A Misunderstanding—Kerrigan's Shortcomings

CHAPTER VII

AN UNSATISFACTORY LANDLORD

THE news had a depressing effect upon Glenore. True, the sojourn of Quality among them could hardly be said to have materially benefited many of the inhabitants, but then their portion in life was generally so meagre a dole that the most careless trifle could not vanish unregretted. Such incidents as a sight of his Honour out above by the lough with his gun, after the snipe or wild duck, or of Miss Merle—God love her!—in her furs and "iligant little high-heeled brogueens" stepping along between the puddles of the deep-banked boreen, or even a respectfully distant glimpse of her ladyship, "the crathur," creeping in her black draperies down one of the shrubbery walks—all had their appreciable value as objects of interest, to be taken into account no less than the more substantial advantages of a market for

chickens and eggs, and an opening for occasional jobs and errands.

In the natural course of things, these fresh spring days are a troublous season for the people who waken to them under the cabin-roofs of Glenore; for by the time that the hedges are greening and the silken-grey catkins dangling among the shrivelled brown keys on the willows, there sets in a universal shortness of commons, which makes it seem a very long look-out until the earliest period when the welcome white and lilac bloom can reasonably be expected to steal over the potato patches. So long it is, indeed, that hopes of relief stop short and fix themselves upon the mackerel fishing in April and May, but only in default of any more congenial resting-place. For despite the fact that most of them have lived their lives beneath a thatch which the salt spray sprinkles, and seldom travel quite beyond reach of the surges' roar, few dwellers in Glenore take kindly to the sea. They have little of that inborn affection for it which generally exists among a maritime folk; on the contrary, their feeling towards it is somewhat resentful and aggrieved, as towards a high-handed neighbour prone to trespass and encroach. A screed of "rhym doggerel" current in the district seems to embody this sentiment, asking and answering—

"Mother, macree, can you tell to me where I'll look for yisterday?"

"You'll find it to hand wid our bit of green land that was lost in the say.'

Perhaps some bygone aggression of the Atlantic may be here commemorated, for, although the waves do not nowadays advance their frontier, traces are discernible of such conquests made in a past not immeasurably remote. Be this as it may, if only a man could come by pitaty-drills enough to keep the childer fed through the long twelvemonth, he would concern himself very little about anything that might be won from the rolling ridges off shore. He would grub and dig and wrestle for bare life with the scarceness that haunts stony places, and while his rent grunted at ease in the rough shed, or clucked and pecked about the floor, he would never think of seeking his fortunes oar in hand. But a lot so opulent seldom falls to anybody in Glenore, where the holdings are shredded very fine. A moderate breaker would sweep one of them from end to end before its foam-crest had slidden into a twinkling film. Hence it is not merely the roof over the tenant's head, but the food in his mouth, that has to be provided by a supplementary estimate, and hence, year after year, when the wedged shoal comes rippling silverly into our

creeks and bays, and the English fishing steamer begins to cruise along the coast, man and boy, loth or lief, betake themselves to their nets and boats.

If it be said that they pursue the seafaring thus thrust upon them in a spirit as cautiously timid as ever was ancient Greek mariner's, this is mainly due to their consciousness of how ill they are equipped for any adventurous courses. Queer, indeed, and clumsy and cranky and crazy is the Glenore fishing fleet, for seaworthy boats cost money, and lives are more easily forthcoming. In the season now drawing on, its condition seemed likely to be still more precarious than usual, by reason of a disaster which had befallen it during the past winter, when a fierce gale from the west had raised such seas in the bay that a number of boats broke loose where they lay at their unsheltered moorings, and through the lulls in the loud night were heard by their grieved owners clashing and bumping as they drifted together in a helpless bunch, with the result that several went to the bottom before dawn glimmered to show the survivors blackly bobbing, all more or less the worse for the experience.

Some of the losses then occasioned were now being made good by expedients which looked rather like an invitation to further sea-sorrow;

for repairs were executed with curious and unlikely materials, and boats long since superannuated were patched up and once more pressed into the service. Biddy Gallaher felt herself "as good as a lone widdy woman" when she saw her husband banging away at the blistered hulk which she had many a time heard him chide for a "blamed ould leaky coffin," as he passed where it lay hauled up discarded on the shingle. She thought it but cold comfort when he told her that all the water in the Atlantic, with Lough Cullenreagh there to the back of it, hadn't a drop in it could drown him unless it happened to be the will of God. That will, according to her experience, was quite as likely to fall in with the horrible pleasure of the waves and winds as to regard the convenience of a red-bearded fisherman and his wife and family.

These operations were, of course, for the most part in progress on the beach, where the mended nets festooned the boulders above high-water mark as if with a preternaturally neat disposition of dark-brown wrack. Now and then, however, some critical piece of carpentry occasioned a resort to Mack's shed, which had become rather thronged in this way on an afternoon when the report of Quality's flitting was still rife, fresh, and ungainsaid. It was a windless, wet day, with sea and

hills in various shades of olive grey and purple slate beneath a sky all one smooth ashen blur. The rain came down so straight that only a little of it found a direct entrance into the open-fronted shed, but visitors' garments were apt to drip, and the curled shavings underfoot had grown limp and muddy. Dan Nolan had been standing ankle-deep in a rock pool for a long while before he stepped up in his squelching brogues to see whether John Mack could supply him with a bit of curved wood needed for the dislocated frame of his old curragh.

"Whethen now, man alive, is it thinkin' to make a job of that ould cratur you'd be?" said the elder Mack, when the shouted request reached him; "sure, there isn't a square inch of her, I'll bet, this long time back, but you could put your finger through like so much stirabout, 'tis that rotted."

"Ay, faix, if it was me, I'd as lief have an ould sack under me be way of a boat," said Peter Mack, who sat on a bench between Hugh Brady and Dan's father, Corney.

"I'm tired sayin' the same thing," said Corney; "I do be tellin' him 'tis as good as biddin' the say-wather rise up and do disthruction on him to go proddin' an oar into it out of any such a quare little pookawn."

"Quare or no, maybe you'll tell me where I'm to git our living till July, and this only April, unless I take me chance at the macker'l," said Dan, bedraggled and dispirited; "begorra, it's swimmin' the round of the world they might be from this till the Day of Judgment, and divil a fut of me'd go after them, if I'd aught better to do. It's aisy talkin' for Peter that has the luck to own a business on dhry land."

"For the matter of that, I wish it had been the same to th' Almighty to ha' conthrived this country a trifle solider like, when he was about it," said Hugh Brady; "for, if you come to consider, that's where the most of the throuble lies—we're short of dhry land. Troth, if that was a bit plentier, the divil might fly away wid road-mendin' and say-fishin', but it's plenty the wrong side out. Sure I often think to meself it's past comperhension what at all was wantin' wid such powers of wather, except to have the say aitin' its way into places that were riddled wid loughs before, like me old coat wid holes. But the sense in a strip of land you can aisy enough see; there's no call to be wastin' your time wonderin' what that's intended for; pitaties, sez I."

"Always supposin'," said Peter, "'tis the right sort and description, for there's more than a little of it where you might as well be settin' a crop in

the roll of the say. Look at them uplands, if there's one acre all great ugly stones, there's hundred-thousands, let alone the wet bogs like yonder, that's naither one thing nor t'other, like a shower of sleet. Bedad, I've set fut on a dale of land you'll niver grow pitaties in."

"There's a sight of bad work in it, and that's a fac'," said his nephew, Paddy, reflectively. "If it was me, now, that had had the consthructin' of it, and I was finding myself skimped for good stuff to be puttin' in it, I'd ha' been very apt just to make the whole concern a couple of sizes or so smaller, and lave the waste bits and rubbish alone—be the piper, maybe I'd ha' let the Ould One have it chape for his buildin' below. Niver a ha'porth of use there is tryin' to put a table together when you've on'y the sound timber for a three-legged stool. It might ha' turned out a dacint tidy little place that-a-way, but look at it now."

"Perhaps when you've done insthructin' the Almighty like a young haythen of a Turk, you'll stand out of a body's road," tartly interposed Mrs. Joe Losty, elbowing past, irked by a natural distaste for unpractical speculations.

"He'll never make anythin' but a botch of it, not if he was distressin' himself over it from this till doomsday, for it's gone to the bad, body and

bones—that's what ails it. He'll get no satisfaction out of tinkerin' at it; 'twould be a long sight less throuble to build a new one clane from the beginnin'," quoth old John, his mind still hammering on Dan Nolan's dilapidated barque.

"Talkin' of the wet bog," said Corney Nolan, with another reversion, "I remember to recollect some ould ages ago, there was a gintleman come to the place said it might be readied up into as good a piece of land as you ever opened a drill in, if the wather was just dhrew off of it, and some cartloads of lime slapped into it; that's to be had handy enough up on Slieve Drumbawn. Supposin' there was any thruth in that, 'tis a pity to see it shakin' under pools and rushes, and it well able to grow pitaties for the parish."

"The thruth's nothin' to us," said Peter Mack, "for the hantle of money them dhrainin' works come to is untould. So if ever 'twas done, 'twould be some sort of Quality 'ud get a hold of it, and sorra the differ 'twould make to the likes of us, unless they might take the notion to run a big stone wall round the dhry edges of it, where the goats pick a bit these time, and that 'ud be no addition or benefit to us. Sure, God knows, 'tis the nature of things to be kep' up for them that have more than they can tell what to do wid already. Look at all them pasture-fields up about

the Big House, lyin' idle they do be from New Year to Christmas Day, and back agin, unless an odd baste or so gets a bite off of them."

"Bedad, yis," said Dan Nolan; "often enough when I'm streelin' along in th' ould boat on the wather there, after them weary fish, and it maybe tumblin' about as dirty and rough as a mill-race, I've looked across to them grass fields shinin' green in the sun, and not a crathur the better; and sez I to meself, it's layin' themselves out to be conthrary things are, and that's a mortial fac'."

"I've as good a mind as ever I had in me life to thry settin' meself a slip of pitaties in there back of the lodge, where I had them before," said Corney. "'Tis twenty chances to one that anybody'd take note of the matter, and at the worst that could happen 'twould on'y be the loss of the seed. "Corney's whole frame seemed to be suddenly brisked up by this idea; from his wizened, grizzled face to his grey-stockinged spindleshanks, as he leaned forward and followed with twinkling eyes the point of his blackthorn, which was tracing on the floor imaginary unlawful drills.

"I declare to goodness, father, you're no better than an ould highwayman; it's ashamed I do be to hear the talk you have of thievin' slips of other folks' ground," protested his daughter, Katty

Walsh, eyeing him, however, with admiring deprecation.

"Och whisht, woman, not at all, sure it's the crathur's nature to be cute like," said Mrs. Gallaher, politely; "and small blame to him aither if he niver planned any worse."

"Rosanne here 'ud ait them up hearty enough, thievin' or no," said Corney, running the tip of his stick into a curl on the head of his infant granddaughter, as she sat among the shavings hard by. But Rosanne only crawled deliberately a few paces further off, and squatted down again, glancing back with a stern expression of countenance, to make sure she was out of reach. Corney looked slightly abashed under this disapproval of two generations, but presently returned, unrepentant, to his pitaty drills.

"Kerrigan's Quality 'ill never pass a remark agin it anyhow," said Peter Mack. "There's some of them, now, I've seen diff'rint times that 'ill be liker a sort of ould walkin' scarecrows than anythin' else you could give a name to, about anywhere they happen to settle. Screech-owlin' they'll be, wid their trespasses and prosecutions, if you so much as reive your ould coat-sleeve agin one of their bits of snaggilty wire. But this Quality's not that sort; they're no more throuble than if they were, so to speak, a flight of little birds roostin' in the place."

"I'm sorry they're quittin' out of it," said Molly Nolan; "if 'twas on'y for missin' them goin' by on the road. Ould Mrs. Caffrey was sayin' poor Norah'd be like one demented, for the young lady'd slip in to see her now and agin, and Norah set the greatest store be it at all. 'Twas on'y last week she brought them a lovely big picture out of a paper, that covered the half of their wall; and Norah's mother sez the night after that she kep' them awake till near daylight, sayin' prayers for Miss Merle; she did so, the crathur."

"They might ha' sted in it like enough, if they'd got better thratement," said Mrs. Gallaher, discontentedly; "but Kerrigan—sure where'd the man larn a right notion of things, that spent his days among goodness may tell what barbarocious haythins?"

Mrs. Gallaher was still shaking out the tattered fringes of her little shawl, with a strong consciousness of civilisation superinduced by this view of the matter, when Molly Nolan twitched a corner, saying, "Whisht, woman, here's himself."

The ostensible object of Kerrigan's call upon the Macks was to bespeak a wheelbarrow; but a doubt whether the long wet afternoon would ever end was what had led him to manufacture for himself this bit of business and desire. Of course Peter Mack said, after compliments, "Well, Mr. Kerrigan, and

so your Quality's about quittin'." Peter, being a man of more than usual travel, was generally left to act as interlocutor on the rare occasions when Kerrigan came among a knot of neighbours.

"That's the first I ever heard of any such thing," said Kerrigan, startled for a moment, the more so that he had seen none of his tenants for two or three days past. Directly afterwards, however, he called to mind several circumstances which convinced him that there could be no foundation for Peter's remark, so he merely repeated, "I know nothing about it," and began to give his order without making further comment.

The neighbours took this indifferent denial as an intimation that he disdained to discuss the subject with them, and were mortified and chagrined.

Mrs. Mack said loudly, "Whethen, maybe, Mrs. Lawson didn't know anythin' about it, and she after tellin' the whole affair to Mrs. Hanlon as long ago as last Tuesday"; and Mrs. Gallaher responded, "Ah, sure, ma'am, they mayn't have given notice exactually yet, but the on'y wonder is that they've stopped in it so long, for, indeed, it's no place for Quality, the way it is now."

"Thrue for you, Mrs. Gallaher, ma'am, bedad, it does be cruel lonesome. Mrs. Lawson was tellin' me where they were before they'd have as much company comin' and goin' on any day might

happen as you'd see here in a twelvemonth of time. Moped they are, sez she, like so many ould bats hung up on a dark wall. Small blame to her ladyship to be losin' her health if you considher how it goes agin you to miss what you're accustomed to, supposin' 'twas just a grain of sugar in your tay."

"Well, but of all the quare things I ever ran across," Hugh Brady took occasion to remark with emphasis, while old John was silently scribbling memoranda on a board, "nothin' bates the idee of puttin' Quality into a place, and not so much as keepin' a horse in the stable for them, not to give the young gintleman a chance of a mount, and then expectin' them to stay contint."

"Musha, good gracious, he won't so aisy get any to put up wid it," affirmed Mrs. Gallaher.

"And Mrs. Lawson after telling me"—Mrs. Mack had enjoyed many of these confidences—"that it used to be a sight to see the young gintleman settin' out to the huntin' they have some place near Dublin—Sir Ben that was, and his cousin, Mr. ——, some outlandish name, she had to him—ould Sir Benjamin's nephew, who got dhrowned on them, the saints may pity him, a finer young man he was, she will have it, than his Honour here, and bigger, for all he wasn't rightly full grown them times. But the both of them were superiligant riders."

"His Honour's big enough for any horse ever stepped," said Peter Mack. "A man on the road was tellin' me the other day that he heard Mr. Harkness over beyond there has a mind to part wid his black mare, a splendid crathur she is, but he's gettin' a trifle clumsy himself, and she's scarce up to his weight. Now, if they'd had a baste like that up at the house, you might have said they were thrated respectable."

"But did anybody ever hear tell of a gintleman's house widout a pianny in it?" said Mrs. Gallaher, in a scandalised tone. She herself inhabited a dwelling hardly commodious enough to make a packing-case for a large specimen of that instrument, yet this did not blunt her perception of the enormity. "Ne'er such a thing they have up there, no more than if they were livin' on the Reek of Croagh Patrick. And Miss Merle the greatest performer you could be listenin' to. Mrs. Lawson sez the music she'd have in the evenin' was the on'y thing that 'ud keep her ladyship heartened up, and they miss it woeful. But it's on'y of a piece wid everythin' else."

"Ay, bedad," said Mrs. Mack, "they've little enough to do that set themselves up to be keepin' Quality, and all the while have no more idee of what's dacint and creditable than one of them

ould saygulls." Mrs. Mack spoke distinctly in her indignation, and her unflattering estimate of his capacity reached Kerrigan's ears as he walked out again in the soft, thick rain.

"Sure, the man's as sulky and steadfast as an ould mule," said Peter Mack; "you might as well whistle jigs to a milestone as be talkin' to him about what's raisonable to git done. Quality'll be better shut of doins and dalins wid him."

KERRIGAN WRITES A NOTE

An Evening's Meditations—Horses and Pianos—The Old Writing-Case—an Undecipherable MS.—Conjectures—A Wet Afternoon—Disappointments—Barley-sugar—Mackerel—Only a Blue Envelope

CHAPTER VIII

KERRIGAN WRITES A NOTE

KERRIGAN found himself back in his square little round-tabled parlour, a gainer by his wet excursion to the extent of about thirty ridded minutes and some fresh material for meditation. He gave, it is true, but small credence to his neighbour's announcement of Quality's immediate departure, still he had not listened unconcerned, because it seemed likely enough to happen sooner or later, and the more he considered the subject the less he could disguise from himself how dolefully he would be affected by that flitting. Just then he had an obvious measure of this to hand in the leaden pace at which his last few days had been crawling, for no other reason than that by accident he had seen nothing of the O'Connors. Seated in his angular armchair, while the hearth began to glower at him through the thickening light, he forecast a coming time when he would sit there with no chance, as he even at that

moment had, of seeing Sir Ben take three long-legged strides up the path to the door and walk into the dull room, bringing with him a current of fresh ideas. As he peered out, imagining steps upon the flags, Kerrigan felt how dreary a difference that would make. His look out into the dusk reminded him that he might then, as heretofore, tramp about the place from dawn to dark, and meet nobody who interested him more than a goat or a goose. He scarcely knew the neighbours save by sight, and though Mrs. Dempsey, who did not mind whether or no anybody marked her, used to recount all the gossip of the day while she clattered about his meal, he seldom exerted himself to distinguish her talk from the utterances of the jingling knives and plates. Hence he was occasionally puzzled when Sir Ben made remarks about the villagers which presupposed some knowledge of their family affairs, and only the other day he had been perplexed near his gate by a shrill quaver of benedictions rising up through an intricate bundle of twigs, which was old Juggy Caffrey homeward bound, bent double under a load of firewood, begged for her by Miss Merle. He had hardly been aware of the old woman's existence, much less of any reason why she should wish the blessin' of all the saints in heaven to light upon his head.

While Kerrigan continued to exchange stares with the red eyes blinking behind the bars, the conviction strengthened upon him that the people down at Mack's had only somewhat antedated a too probable event when they talked about Quality leaving Glenore. Any resentment that he might have felt at their strictures upon his own shortcomings as a landlord was quite overridden by his sympathy with their wish that he should keep his tenants. As for horses and pianos, although he hoped little from such expedients, he was very willing to try their effect in putting off the evil day. It might be worth while to see after Mr. Harkness's mare, and to sound Sir Ben about the piano.

"But 'twould take a long sight more than that to keep him in it," he reflected; "he's told me himself that he's bound to get something to do, and what's delaying him is only her Ladyship being so indifferent, with nobody else to look after things for her and the children. There's just a chance he might have some other reason for stopping, but it's plain to see the hankering he has to be off abroad somewhere. To be sure, his luck's run again him in this country, and my belief is it's left something at the bottom of his mind that he can't abide the looks of and he's a notion he could turn his thoughts off it

better if he took to travelling. But according to my experience, he might spare himself the trouble, for as long as it's there, to that they'll be running ; it's like driving a mob of cattle past a gap in a fence ; not a one of them but 'ill make a lunge at it with its fool's head going by, if it doesn't flounder in holusbolus. Anyway, if there was nothing else, it's not in the nature of reason to suppose that a young man with plenty of book-learning, and all manner, is likely to stop content in a place where there's not a soul to be met but what are as ignorant as the dirt they step through." Kerrigan inferred Sir Ben's erudition partly from having heard him speak regretfully of his college days, abridged by family troubles, and partly from a habit he had of reading at stray moments in a red-edged pocket-volume of the Odyssey. "And he's hard up too, I think," Kerrigan went on musing. "That's bad ; ay, that's about the worst of it, for there's nothing apter to set one of his sort off hot-foot after some mad bit of work he's no fitter for than I'm fit for pianny-playing, and then the chances are, before he knows where he is, he's landed in a tight corner that he'll never get out of. By Jingo, the devil has his own diversion with those swells when he finds them knocking around. I've no sort of doubt 'twas that way

with the other poor chap, and if Sir Ben here takes to it, more's the pity—but I can't bid him bide or quit."

By the time that he had reached this point it had grown quite dark in the room. He lighted himself a candle, and turned to an occupation which rather often served him as a starting-place and terminus for his trains of thought. Johnny Day's old writing-case that he began to look through was a very small, shabby one, easily carried in a breast pocket. There were few things inside its battered purple-leather cover—some rusty pen nibs, a stump of pencil, a carte-de-visite, a folded paper; that was nearly all. The photograph, which had faded in dapples and had been cracked right across, was of a very young girl. As he looked at it to-night he said to himself: "I declare, now, it's as queer as anything; but I'd say there was a likeness too, I would. A good bit younger, and something fuller in the face, but, bedad, when I was talking to her the other day, I knew I had a sort of recollection in my mind, and there it is. It's surprising the way things do run together by chance, but I suppose the fact of the matter is that there's more people going about the world than there's different patterns for. As for Sir Ben, 'tisn't only his looks, but his

manner of speaking, and his ways entirely; if any one had told me the two of them were brothers I wouldn't have wondered an atom, and they nothing to say to one another whatsome'er. Good Lord, the first sight I got of him lying his length down there in the lane, I dunno what notion it put in my head for a minute."

He took up the sheet of paper. It was of rather a large size, and had been folded across and across with many creases, which here and there almost obliterated the writing. This consisted of foreign characters, scrawled evidently with an unsteady hand and a blunt-pointed pencil. "I'd give something considerable to know what's wrote in it, I would," Kerrigan thought, poring over the baffling lines. "What the mischief took the chap to write outlandish that way? There was nothing of the sort in his speech. But anyhow, I'd take my oath he intended something to be done with it; there was somebody belike that he wanted it sent to. He didn't do it just for amusement to himself, that's certain. I've seen him scrawling at it of an evening when he was hard set to hold himself up, unless he had his back again a bush, and his hand that shaky, you'd think he was scattering hay-seed. Ay, he gave himself a deal of trouble over it, God help him, that got little enough help while he

wanted it. I never can make my mind up whether he was going to say something to me about it that morning I found him working at it, if I hadn't begun slanging him for not having the pack ready. I wish to goodness the both of us had stayed where we left him, I do so. I might as well for all I got by coming back. . . . Maybe, after all, there's nothing over-sensible in it; for when folks are as far gone as he must have been, there's no accounting for the notions they'll take into their heads about religion and such. I remember one flood-time crossing the Wonawona river along with a man that was 'cute enough, not to speak of being as big a ruffian as ever walked on dry land, but when he thought we wouldn't get over before the freshet came down on us, the prayers he said were a caution. So if the lad felt himself mortal bad, it might have set him writing somehow religious—hymns, for instance. That's the only way I can explain it, if there's poetry in this here, as the man I was asking said. The shortish lines about the middle have something that appearance. And it's just the chance makes me that I'd sooner show it to Miss Merle than Sir Ben; for I'd be sorry to have anybody see it who'd consider it anyway ridiculous. Sir Ben has no opinion of hymns." Kerrigan gathered this from Sir Ben's explanations one day when pursued along the road by a

gossoon with "his Honour's hymn-book he was after droppin' out of his pocket." "But women mostly have a liking for them. And they've very little notion, either, whether a thing's ridiculous or no. If they had, they'd not put up with a deal of what they do, and that's a fact. But what's the sense of guessing at it? The best plan 'll be to ask her to look at it; and I don't see what I'm waiting for, unless it's until the whole gets rubbed out clean, past anybody's reading."

He considered the subject off and on throughout the long evening, and ended by selecting a large blue glazed envelope, into which he put Johnny Day's undecipherable MS. To this he added a short note, the composition of which kept him up far later than his usual bedtime. "MADAM," it ran,—"Excuse the liberty I take in sending you the German writing. Respectfully, MARTIN KERRIGAN.' Then he addressed the envelope to Miss Merle, and on the next morning handed it for delivery to Andy Nolan, who, perceiving nothing ominous in its aspect, jog-trotted with it in due course to the Big House.

Late on that afternoon Kerrigan's Quality were most of them assembled in the drawing-room, all more or less out of employment, as happens towards the close of a steadily wet day. Small incidents bulk large under these circumstances,

which is perhaps the reason why Tom observed, in a tone of disproportionate solemnity, "Here's a halfpenny lying on the sofa-table. Did you know, Merle, that there was a halfpenny lying on the sofa-table?" Merle said, "Dear me, Tom, you really shouldn't tell people such startling things so suddenly;" and his brother Ben appeared demonstratively about to swoon. Whereat Tom, who was ten years old, and stood stiffly upon his dignity, walked away in a huff. His good humour was, however, before long restored by the excitement of meeting the letter-bag on its way up from the kitchen. "Is that all you have for me?" Merle said, as he gave her the blue envelope. "It doesn't look very interesting, Tom, does it?" She laid it down unopened, a slight sinking of the heart for the moment depressing her energies below curiosity point. I do not know exactly what she had expected, or even thought possible that any post should bring her; perhaps she hardly knew herself. But she did, undoubtedly, wait much upon its recurrent tide, which is sometimes a mere languid fall and rise, mediterraneanly imperceptible, and once in a while comes as a foam-headed ogre, surging fiercely over our drowned fields.

But though Merle's secret disappointment was also vague and groundless, that post caused another, quite definite and frankly avowed. Lady

O'Connor's countenance fell tragically as she said, "*Nothing* for me from Loureaux and Jermyn?" For Loureaux and Jermyn were advertising a newly invented lozenge, miraculously efficacious in diseases of the throat, which was the point upon which her hovering fears had for the time being fluttered down. "This is a great blow," she said, piteously, "I had counted all day on having them before the night, and now how I am to get through it with this terrible irritation of the larynx is more than I can say."

Merle stood meditating sympathetically. "There was a sort of syrup," she said, "that Mrs. Davis used to give us, made of barleysugar and lemon juice boiled, with a few drops of glycerine in it. Sir Fitzalan Gray told her that it was the most soothing thing you could take, and you know he's a specialist. Let me make you some, Aunt Etta. I know there's barleysugar in your room, because I stole a stick this morning, and ate it for something to do. I could make it in the kitchen, and have it ready before dinner-time." Her aunt assented with polite despondency, as one drowning might accept the well-meant offer of a straw; and Merle went off to her cookery, leaving her uninteresting blue envelope stuck between the pages of popular "Middlemarch."

The kitchen, with its core of piled-up glow

"POOR SOUL'S ASTARTE CARESSING A FOUL-LOOKED CAT." — Page 111.

flashed round from platter to pan, seemed set like a ruddy jewel at the end of the long, dark stone passages. Its outer door opened on a gathering gloom, which was visibly full of rain in the wedge of red light which was thrust out through the falling drops over the wet cobble-stones of the yard. Along this glistening track Molly Nolan appeared, pattering barefooted, in her dull crimson skirt and fawn-coloured shawl, carrying a pink-frocked baby, and half a dozen brown eggs to sell, in a blue-rimmed bowl. "Ay, it's a soft night we're gettin', melady," she said to Merle, who had just finished her concoction; "but sure we'll do right well so long as the win' doesn't rise up on us; it's apt enough, for the clouds were streelin' about agin' the sunsettin' like so many hanks of ravelled yarn, and that's a bad sign for the storms. Be the same token, nothing 'ud suit the macker'l better than to be comin' in when the weather's dirty."

"Have they come?" said Merle, wondering whether the grey-eyed baby were of an age to appreciate barleysugar.

"There was a shoal of them seen off of Derry-glesh Point last night, Miss Merle, and bad cess to them," said Molly, "enticin' the lads after them they'll be, like a flock of fishin' gulls. But, glory be to the great goodness, himself's took uncommon

indifferent this day, wid the rheumatics all over him, so as he can't be stirrin' hand or fut to go get dhrowned in the ould boat. Whethen now, Tim, I'm ashamed of you. What do you say to the young lady for givin' you the beautiful bit of sugary-candy? Frettin' the man does be, and axin' where's the rint to come from; but sez I to him, 'Faix now, man-alive, it's at the bottom of forty fathom of wather you'll be apt to find your rint, if you go lookin' for it in that ould wreck, and she wid scarce enough sound timber in her to keep her holes together. And sure,' sez I, 'starvin's dacinter, anyway, than drownin'.' There, Tim, the young lady's gone off wid herself, and you never said so much as thank'ee to her, no more than a young vulture."

Merle brought her bottle of clear amber syrup to the drawing-room, where she found Sir Ben scrutinising the blue envelope. "It's like Kerrigan's hand," he said; "but what would make him write to you?"

"Most likely it's only a bill from Hanlon's," said Merle, who was distractedly stiffening her sugar-glazed fingers. "Open it and see, I'm too sticky to touch anything."

But at that moment the dinner-bell rang, and her letter remained where it was until after breakfast next morning, when she happened to think of it once more.

A VOYAGE

Morning on the Beach—Delayed Mails—The Blue Envelope opened—Solecisms—A Bad Turn—Resolved to Know—Rowing to Rossmalevin—A Phantom Laid—Paddy's Discovery—The Little Red Bullock—Putting in for Repairs

CHAPTER IX

A VOYAGE

THE next morning's ebb, which broadened the rusty belt of weed along the Glenore beach, seemed to draw away with it all the dark awning of rain clouds, disclosing beyond them a softer, lighter fabric, as the filmy wings are unfolded beneath a beetle's black shards. Even this, as the sun mounted, began to blanch and brighten, curdling into snowy drifts intertissued with silver and mother-o'-pearl. It was a sky which promised to break into full blue by noon. When Sir Ben strolled down early to the shore he found Kerrigan there, standing and staring out to seaward, beside a line of hauled-up boats. Kerrigan, in fact, had an unusual enterprise in view. He thought of rowing across to Rossmalevin, where dwelt Mr. Harkness, owner of the grand black mare. What rendered it rather doubtful whether he would carry out his intention was the necessity of hiring a boat; for his frosty custom of holding aloof from his neigh-

bours had made intercourse with them burdensome to a degree scarcely conceivable by people of more genial habits. His spirits rose, however, and his resolve strengthened when Sir Ben agreed to join him, and went to negotiate with Felix Carroll and other boat-owners who were at hand.

Choice of boats was diminished by the fact that a number had gone out at sunrise in quest of mackerel. They had been impelled thereto by a rumour that a shoal was "leggin' off wid itself as fast as it could drive out to say agin, and sorra the the tail-end of it 'ud anybody get the chance of a sight of that didn't set about overhaulin' it wid his best fut foremost." Some people disbelieved this report and said: "Divil a much. It's thick wid them the bay'll be in a couple of days, and no need to be say-voyagin' after them half-way across to the States." But others, less sceptical, or more nervous about possibly letting slip their chance of securing rent and supplementary provisions, had taken the warning seriously and set forth at the first streak of dawn. These, too, were, as it happened, for the most part the proprietors of the least seaworthy craft.

"Poor Molly Nolan's in a fine disthraction this mornin', your Honour," remarked Barney Mack. "She was consaitin' she had himself safe at home in bed, wid the rheumatics in every bone of his

body, and not a stir out of him. But och, bejabers, the first news he heard tell of the macker'l, up he flourishes himself and away wid him, for all she could do or say, and to make it better, he's took the two young lads along wid him in their ould yoke. Molly's been mopin' about the place like a strayed hin that's missin' her chuckens."

"Sure if I'd ha' known the man would be goin' out," said Felix Carroll, "I'd liefer ha' given him the loan of ours than to be lettin' him after the fish in an ould turf boat, and a leaky one at that."

"They'll do right enough this fine smoothery weather," said Mack.

"They might so," said Jim Gallaher, "if they were keepin' to the wooden sails; but, bedad, I misthrust this ould bay wid anythin' else. Sure you never can tell the minute a blast of a squall mayn't fall slap off that ugly big block of Slieve Drumaglish there, and just pin down any bit of a rag you'd hoisted into the wather. And that ould crathur Nolan's in, if she got e'er a wrong slant on her, it's under the tide she'd be wallopin' herself before you could look round, and in no hurry about comin' up agin, any more than if she was after swallyin' down the Rock of Cashel."

"What we're awantin'," said Barney Mack, "is a dacint bit of a landin' pier, and a sizeable breakwather out beyant there, agin the says 'ill be runnin'

off of Buckle Point and Gortnagle. 'It's makin' across there, your Honour, in dirty weather, that most of the accidents 'ill be happenin'. Ay, faix, if we'd the like, there's many a mother's son of us 'ud be alive on dry land this mortial day, and, more betoken, for the not havin' them there's apt to be another couple or so of us sleepin' under wet thatch agin this day next year. But sure now if we'd that much purtection in it, we might go fishin' for diversion. Sorra aught else 'ud we want at all."

Barney spoke cheerily and airily, as if the structures he mentioned seemed any more feasible than the Great Wall of China. "And what have you there, me hayro?" he inquired, as Andy Nolan came up with a letter-bag.

They were, it appeared, letters which had been delayed overnight by reason of Mrs. Gibbs having accidentally slipped them under a side of bacon when sorting the mails, and which Andy, espying his Honour upon the beach, now took the opportunity to deliver. Looking over the small packet handed to him, Sir Ben said: "This is the Greek paper; Andy may as well bring it up to the house, as I'm not going home straight. It's modern Greek, you know, Kerrigan." Kerrigan was eyeing the paper curiously. "We used at one time to talk it a good deal with Dion Ionidês."

"Who, sir?" said Kerrigan.

"SHE LOOKED OVER THE STEEP GARDEN SLOPE."—*Page* 141.

"Ionidès. He was my cousin, half a Greek. He lived a great part of his life in this country, but, of course, knew his own language, and we all picked it up as children. Miss Merle keeps it up, and has the *Ephemeris* sent to her regularly. She could tell you all the Athenian news."

"Now that's queer enough," said Kerrigan, still peering at the little paper.

"There's Miss Merle herself," said Joe Caroll, "up above, talkin' to Mrs. Nolan."

Merle, as we know, had after breakfast remembered her unopened envelope, and she read its contents sitting on her low window seat. Then when she looked out over the steep garden-slope, she saw neither the smooth grey water, nor the softly veiled sky, nor the iron-dark cliff-wall between them. She was blinded by her concentrated endeavour to recall any words that Kerrigan might have said about the writer of the blurred sheets trembling in her hand. But they had been spoken in ears unaware of any fateful import, and she could now summon back nothing to abridge the contest between joy and terror, which seemed to "thrust against her nearest of life." It was almost with a self-preserving instinct that she started up, resolved to go at once in search of Kerrigan, and learn the worst or best.

Her run downstairs was, however, arrested half-

way by a call through her aunt's open door. Lady O'Connor had slept well, by virtue, she believed, of Merle's prescription, and was anxious to gratify her with a testimonial to the syrup. But though Merle's face did brighten unmistakably as she listened, it is to be feared that her expression was somewhat misleading. The fact is that her spirits were just then in a state of very unstable equilibrium, swinging wildly to the most trivial touch, and the circumstance that the three youngest children, squatted on a sunny patch on the floor, were playing with an old sandal-wood box—once a favourite pastime of her own—sufficed to send her hopes flying up and up. The familiar foreign scent of the box with its Indian trinkets seemed somehow to convince her that certain good days, deemed more hopelessly lost than childhood's, were coming back again. The assurance was delightful; but it increased her eagerness to obtain one more definite, and all in a breath she congratulated her aunt, and greeted Mrs. Lawson, and explained how she must hurry down to the village with Norah Caffrey's knitted jacket. As she shut the door, Lady O'Connor observed that Miss Merle looked remarkably well, and Mrs. Lawson, twisting up a thin plait, replied that navy-blue was very becoming on some people. Little Louis, too, said reflectively, "Merle is the shiningest-eyed person I ever saw."

But Betty kicked him on one side, saying with ostentatious propriety, "Oh, hush! Louis, you mustn't; rude remarks are disgusting;" while on the other, Mina said severely, "You shouldn't ought *ever* to say 'shiningest-eyed' it's 'shining-eyedest.'" So Louis subsided, crushed by these simultaneous strictures upon his manners and grammar.

Merle walked very fast all the way to the village, beyond which lay Kerrigan's farm, and her shining-eyedness notwithstanding, she might as well have gone blindfold for anything that she noticed on the road. She had passed from underneath the misty-green roof of the avenue and down the hill and along by the brimming lough margin, where the level water blinked at her through a screen of stalks and leaves, before she became more than sub-conscious of her surroundings. Then, as a stumble would have made her heed her steps, a momentary difficulty in identifying the person who accosted her as Molly Nolan, warned her that she must wrench her thoughts back to present facts.

"Ah, now, Miss Merle, jewel, may goodness forgive me for sayin' such a thing," quoth Molly, "and the blessin' of God be on the kind nature He's put in you, but it's the bad turn you're after doin' me this time whatever."

"Why, Mrs. Nolan, how is that?" said Merle.

"Sure, then, didn't you send down an elegant sup of broth for himself last night be Danny Shera? 'Deed, Miss Merle, but 'twas the grand stuff and the smell of it delightful when I did be hatin' it up for the poor man that had scarce tasted e'er a bit the whole day. Bedad, he swallied it down like a calf wid its head in a bucket of milk. And a little while after, sez he to me, 'Bless me bones, Norah, there was a powerful stren'th in that broth. Since ever I took it,' sez he, 'the suppleness that's come over me is surprisin'.' But it's meself knew well enough what he was at, for Jim Gallaher had been in not so long before blatherin' about goin' after the macker'l and all manner. So sez I, 'Och, listen to the way the win' 's howlin',' I sez, and wid that I just slipped me ould shawl across the pane of glass, for 'fraid he might happen to notice the clear night it was got outside. 'Divil a howl I hear out of it at all then,' sez he, and small blame to him, for there wasn't a breath 'ud thrimble a feather of grass; so sez I to him very belike the could was gone to his ears and he had better be lying quiet, supple or no. 'It's up I'll be gettin' early to-morra, anyway,' sez he, as headstrong as a young jackass, 'and there's no good argufyin'.' Well, then, I thought to meself, as soon as it would be light I'd go and get Barney Mack to him, for Barney's a raisonable sort of man

and folk's apt to mind what he sez ; and I slipped out afore he was awake, but I'll give you me word, Miss Merle, be the time I'd run back, out he was on the beach, foostherin' about at the ould boat, and off wid him all we could do or say afore the sun came round the hill. And be the same token, nothin' 'ud suit him but to be takin' Stevie and Jim along, 'cause he said bein' a thrifle stiff, he might want an extry hand. Och, mercy on us all, miss dear, he's an awful determined man. I thought I had him safe that time, but he would have it the sup of broth made a cure on him."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Nolan," said Merle ; "but this is such a lovely morning, surely there can't be much fear of any harm happening to them."

"The goodness above us grant it," said Molly, solemnly ; "'tis the holes in her that keep gettin' into me head. Himself consaits that she'll bob up like a cork whatever comes agin her. But for the matter of the broth, like enough 'twas just an excuse, and he'd have made a shift to go whether or no, for his mind was terrible set on the macker'l. And thank you kindly, Miss Merle, jewel, all the same. And if you were lookin' for his Honour, I saw him a minute ago below on the beach there spakin' to Mr. Kerrigan."

Merle suddenly grasped at the recollection of her errand to the Caffreys ; that would postpone

for a while the interview which, at such close quarters, could not but wear a fearful aspect. It was a crisis of fate on the brink of which pauses and shrinking are as inevitable and unavailing as the eddying round of something caught in the whirlpool's meshes. But though she asked questions on purpose to procure delay, allowing her attention to wander off wildly while they were being answered, which made the conversation rather incoherent in its structure, the visit could not be indefinitely prolonged. As she was leaving the dark little room, Norah said, "I suppose it's very like I'll never set eyes on you again, Miss Merle; but sure anyway I'll be sayin' prayers for you lyin' here, honey, until the end of my life's days." For the news of Quality's imminent departure had been accepted by her unquestioningly as authentically deplorable tidings. Merle had a vague impression that Norah's remark was somewhat unaccountable, but just then the grip of suspense tightened upon her, and she hurried away without seeking an explanation.

Down on the beach she found Kerrigan, standing alone, and for a moment she believed that she was about to know all. But when her fingers were already on Johnny Day's letter in her pocket, Sir Ben came clattering over the shingle, and her opportunity was for the time being gone.

"Come across with us, Merle," he said; "you've no idea what a queer place that bog is at the other side; you ought to see it. We haven't had such a splendid day for a row this year. Just look there!" He pointed over a tawny weed-track to the water lying unruffled, a sheet of liquid gloss between shore and shore. Sir Ben made the suggestion with the very slightest hope that Merle would entertain it, for her avoidance of the sea was so habitual that her appearance even on the extreme edge of the beach seemed an out-of-the-way incident. Accordingly he felt a thrill of the glee which greets a good thing come not by any means of course, when she said, "Very well, Ben, I will."

"It's just lucky I thought of asking her," he reflected; "it was a mere toss up whether I did or not." His surprise would have been increased, perhaps rather at the expense of his gratification, had he known that Merle was coming only because she could not bear to lose sight of Kerrigan. To be cast adrift for an indefinite number of hours upon that suddenly risen flood of conjecture, bewildered and appalled by its surge of promise and threat, was not an endurable prospect. She thought that the expedition would certainly at some point offer her a chance of getting speech of Kerrigan, and laying her doubts to rest.

It appeared, however, that this was not to happen during the transit to Rossmalevin. Sir Ben had secured the Macks' boat, with the serviees of Paddy Mack included, and while Paddy and he took the oars, Merle, sitting in the stern, was beyond speaking range of Kerrigan on his forward bench. She recognised the postponement as unavoidable, but said to herself that it would be bounded by their hour's row—a date neither dreadfully near nor tormentingly remote ; and a comparative lull of agitation fell upon her, as the smooth gliding away from the shore began.

When she dipped her hand, and drew her fingers through the clear green water, it felt soft and warm to her touch, and she watched it take richer jewel-tints about the wavering edges of the rocks, scarcely covered, and in among their interstices, till presently she was passing over depths of the blank translucence more eye-baffling than opacity. Yesterday she could not have looked into them without horror. The sea, whatever aspect it showed to her bodily vision, had called up always the same mental picture. Murky night and storm, with a black welter of water pent between a high stone wall, and a tall vessel's side ; smooth, slimy surfaces, that would mock a drowning man's clutch if he were dashed against them before the smothering waves choked him and bore

him down; while a racket and clamour on quay and deck, importing mainly the safe bestowal of luggage, made it the less likely that anybody would guess what was being lost below there in the heaving dark, where stray splashes of lamplight were swirled as they fell into lurid coils.

Now this had all passed away from her like a fever-phantom, and Merle looked round her with a touch of compunction, as at something that she had cursed without cause. She had, it is true, always clung to a secret hope which protested against the acceptance of the event as a certainty; but that hope had been a feeble champion, coping single-handed with a host of ruthless probabilities. Hence its sudden vindication disposed her now to adopt a sceptical attitude towards every alternative fear. Nor had she yet had time to imagine a new setting for her tragedy, if tragedy it were to be; some vividly hateful scene, which she might dream of night after night with all its details unchanged. And, meanwhile, the whole world appeared kinder for the absence of any such ill-omened spot.

Some obtrusively startling incident would have been needed to penetrate the reverie wherein Merle sat wrapped; yet her companions thought it expedient to lower their voices carefully for

fear of alarming her, as they discussed an untoward circumstance which had arisen. It was when they had accomplished about half of their row, diagonal-wise across the broadest reach of the bay, that Paddy Mack abruptly saw fit to attract Kerrigan's attention by a violent tug at his coat, which nearly pulled him off the bench. Kerrigan kept his balance by a timely prance and flounder with his feet, and looked round angrily for an explanation.

"D'ye know what I'm after doin', Mr. Kerrigan?" said Paddy. Paddy wore on his head a limp, flappy, black felt hat, originally the property of some theological student, but long ago purchased by Paddy's mother out of an old-clothes cart at Gortnagle fair, since when he had done all his carpentering, farming, and fishing under the shadow of its broad brim. Its crown had cracked spirally in several places, and his hair stood up through the fissures in stubbly tufts; his countenance beneath showed puckers of perturbation.

"You're after bein' within a shavin' of tippin' me overboard," said Kerrigan, with justifiable asperity, "and you needn't do it again."

"Och indeed, but it isn't that at all, at all," said Paddy.

"It was something uncommonly like it, then"

said Kerrigan, "and I'll trouble you not to play any more such fools' tricks."

"It's a dale liker the whole of us tippin' down to the bottom there," said Paddy, rather wildly.

"What the mischief are you talking about?" said Kerrigan.

"Sure, the last time Peter Hanlon's cattle tuk to stray on him," said Paddy, "there was that little baste of a red bullock of his——"

"Look you here, me man," began Kerrigan, impressively, "if you've been coming on board with drink taken——"

"Is it drink?" protested Paddy. "The divil receive the sup, if that was all that ailed us."

"What's up, Kerrigan?" asked Sir Ben, become aware of the dialogue through the pausing of Paddy's oar.

"This chap's not rightly sober, I think, sir," said Kerrigan.

"Sure, your Honour," said Paddy, "I was tellin' Mr. Kerrigan the way it happened on me. As I was sayin'; when I came down on the beach that mornin'—it might ha' been last Tuesday or so—there was the whole collection of the crathurs streelin' about at loose ends, just out of divilment, unless they'd a notion to be aitin' the stones. But the big thief of a little red bullock no diversion 'ud suit him except to get

batterin' his horns agin this ould boat of ours that we had hauled up there. Bedad, the drives he was hittin' her 'ud surprise you; you'd ha' thought his two horns 'ud be through her as aisy as you prod a pitchfork through a wisp of the weed. And the mischief knows how long he mayn't ha' been workin' away at it before I come and hurooshed them off. So I just was about lookin' to see had he any harm done on her, on'y that very minute an invention lit in me head of a way I could be conthrivin' to fix the rims of the wheels firrm on your Honour's little yoke of a machine, and that tuk me off to the shed—and from that good day to this, never a thought I gave to the old boat at all, until just now I noticed somethin' put me in mind—look there, sir." Paddy cautiously raised one of his feet very slightly, and the movement was immediately followed by a hollow gurgle, and the welling up of a small sparkling spring. As commentary thereon Sir Ben said, "By Jove!" and Kerrigan said, "You blamed young fool."

"Me sowl to the saints, but I believe there's a whole plank started in her somewheres, I do so," said Paddy, desperately divulging his worst apprehensions. "I know she's a patch on her there or thereabouts, and if the wather gets a hold of that, I couldn't tell the day or the minute

we mayn't have a leak openin' on us fit to let in the full of the lough like a sluice. And after that it's settlin' down under our feet she'd be, afore we know where we are." In accordance with his forebodings a thin stream spurted sharply up from under his heel, and trickled down briskly into a pool which gleamed between the loose cross boards.

"We must stop it somehow temporarily, and make for land as fast as we can," said Sir Ben, glancing from Merle to the shore, which looked a long way off, and finding it advisable to hold over his criticisms upon Paddy's proceedings for the present.

"I question could we reach that far at all," said Paddy. "I was thinkin' we'd do better to run her over to Inish Cloghawn there"—he pointed towards a low, black rock-reef at a few hundred yards' distance—"and then we might get a chance to ready her up a bit, more commodious like, than to be fiddlin' at it here, where we've thirty fathom of wather under us, so that 'twould turn out awkward enough if anythin' happened, wid her young ladyship on board and all. We'd be out of the straight way of drownin', at all events, once we got there."

This appeared to be a rather obvious advantage, and their course was forthwith altered as Paddy

suggested. "We have to stop here for a bit for some small repairs," Sir Ben called to Merle, who felt some chagrin at the intervention of even the briefest further delay. She watched the dark rock-ledges loom nearer with an uneasy feeling, which was in part impatience, but in part a dim presentiment. The aspect of the place caused her, as sometimes happens, an indefinable dismay.

"If it's meself isn't the bastely ijjit, get me one," Paddy said, semi-soliloquising between his pulls. "The lads at home do be always tellin' me I'm clane demented over the little wheel-yoke; but, begorra, I never ha' believed that be raison of it I'd come that near doin' destruction on the Quality, let alone the young lady herself. Musha, it's no thanks to me if the whole of us isn't this instant of time contendin' wid arms and legs for our lives, like so many flies in a saucer of milk."

However, as in a few minutes more the boat's keel grated and jarred on the shingly margin of Inish Cloghawn, that tragical issue might be supposed to no longer threaten.

ON INISH CLOGHAWN

The Inish—Looking Back—A New Spectre—Detention—A Strange Request—Five Thousand Sovereigns—A Wild Night—Old Sir Ben's Letter—Interrupted

CHAPTER X

ON INISH CLOGHAWN

INISH CLOGHAWN is an unprepossessing little bit of the earth's surface, being in fact simply the slight terminal peak on a mountain-spur which shoots out submarinely half-way across the bay. The few perches of sullen, blackish rock which generally appear above water show a conformation of bare, shelving ledges, with streaks of coarse shingle lying between, like gravel thrown in to fill a rut. From year's end to year's end no foot treads them, except perhaps that of some passing sea-fowl, more likely to cross it "with one waft of wing"; and the resident population is comprised in a small colony of limpets. Yellow-brown sea-weed is the sole vegetable production. It over-trails all the lower ledges with heavy-podded festoons, and thickly bewigs a cluster of dark, rounded boulders, which seem to bob up about them like the heads of huge seals; even the

topmost ridge of the Inish has its drapery, though as a rule waxen sundried and flaccid.

If the sea could be suddenly all drained off from around Inish Cloghawn it would reveal on one side an ugly, smooth precipice, sheer and high enough to prevent any weak-headed person from looking over its brink with equanimity. But its present clear setting of lapping water beguiles it of any such formidable aspect, and Merle, now listlessly making the circuit of the reef while the others were busy about the boat, seated herself on the very coping of that colossal wall with as little concern as if it had been a two-foot dyke. She looked back across the polished steel-grey mirror, where faint flaws of breeze and sunshine were engraving little darts and arrows of silvery light, lengthened here and there into spears and javelins. The delicate, dappled verdure of the fresh meadows and half-fledged woodlands, whence she had voyaged away, basked in a sunglow that seldom shifted and waned, for the frail cloud lattice was melting off like an April frost, and the sky would be clear by noontide. Their soft greenery, beaded with the twinkling white of the cottages on the strand, seemed to beckon her home and somehow prophesy good luck to her among the satin-sheathed grass-blades and finely creased leaf-buds, in scent of the curling clear blue smoke. She

wished vaguely that she were back there again, yet felt all the while how she was looking at them across a gulf which held far more terrible possibilities than the tide rippling fast by: the question to be asked and answered before she set foot in Glenore.

Her companions were out of sight behind a rock, and almost beyond earshot, their voices reaching her only in an indistinct murmur, until a succession of resounding thuds, as they began tentatively to thump the boat, rang out on the spacious silence with a startling loudness. It had the effect of suddenly recalling Merle from the spring-tinted mainland to the sombre screed of barren reef, which just then more immediately concerned her, and in her capriciously poised mood the transition seemed like the relinquishment of a receding hope, effaced by a very near and present dread. The flat-topped boulder beside her felt cold and clammy to her touch as she laid her hand upon it, and she thought that the green fields were warm in the sun. When she looked over her shoulder, she could see nothing except a series of stony ledges, sloping back to the low central ridge of the little Inish, just high enough to block out a further view. If she had stood up, she would have beheld the sea again only a few feet beyond; but where she sat there was nothing visible to impede

her in imagining that the scrap of desert spread away and away without limit; and this she began to do. Not with any set purpose; it was involuntarily, and half unawares that her mind became pervaded by a sense of the vast lifeless plain, glared over by a scorching sky, which rained its light down inexorably on the two solitary travellers, whose faces grew clearer and clearer to her inward eye, as if it were in a ripening sun-picture. Their steps and voices were almost audible to her. She joined in their desperate scanning of the empty horizon; she turned heart-sick as she saw one of them lag, and stumble, and fall behind his comrade, until at last, although she struggled against it as one resists the culminating horror of a nightmare, she saw him fallen on the ground, and the other walking on alone—a sight which so smote her with despair that she found herself on the verge of actually calling aloud to him to come back.

That startled her out of her dream, and she returned to the real world with an unhappy foreboding that this scene was from henceforth to be her substitute for the loud night storm, and the murky corner where the black water gurgled and soughed low down under the slimy pier-wall. It seemed all the less endurable for its newness, and its unfamiliar misery was pierced through by a

keen impatience of the suspense, which was to end perhaps—perhaps in the dispelling of all such evil visions for evermore. Merle looked up with a thrill of fearful hope, for she thought she heard Kerrigan coming in stern answer to her wish. But it was only Sir Ben who came towards her over the slippery ledges and sliding shingle. He sat down on a rock at right angles with hers, and looked at her with a somewhat chagrined expression.

"I regret to report, ma'am," he said, "that that young *gomeral* Mack has brought out his boat in such a state of disrepair it seems we shall scarcely manage to patch her up safely" (he suppressed the ascertained fact that they had been within a very few minutes of foundering); "so there's nothing for it but to stay where we are—I don't mean permanently. They say some of the boats that went out fishing early this morning will be coming back before long, and there'll presently be a lot more going out; they all pass close by, and we can hail one of them. Of course it's an awful bore, Merle, and I hope you don't much mind."

"Oh, no, not a bit," said Merle, with a sinking heart, as she considered that the Inish was not likely to afford her any opportunity.

"Paddy Mack wanted us to let him 'chance it home in the ould concern,'" said Sir Ben. "He said that as like as not she might hold up that far,

and it would serve him only right if she sorted out a place where there was fifty fathom of water to go down in. He also stated that he hadn't as much wit in his four bones as a boiled herring, and that he'd liefer have drowned all the way to the States and back again than to be putting her young ladyship to any sort of inconvenience. But as it's only a matter of an hour or two's delay, one couldn't let him run such a risk."

"Of course not," said Merle.

"This is certainly a very unchancy little rubbish heap," he said, surveying the Inish with ungrateful disapproval. "The most that any one could say in its favour is that there's not much of it. Lucky for us, though, that there is *some*."

"Ben," said Merle, suddenly, "I want you to tell me about the time when Dion was—lost; how it all happened. I heard it only by bits and scraps, for letters tell one nothing rightly, and I can never speak of it to Aunt Etta. But now I have a reason for wishing to know just how it was."

She would not have found it easy to explain her reason clearly, even to herself. Though the story had, as she said, come to her piecemeal, she had fitted the fragments together during days whose dark memories were dyed in grain, until she felt sure that no significant facts were wanting. These were not, therefore, what she sought. A restless

desire to turn her speech into the track of her thoughts, albeit constrained to let it lag behind them, was probably the actuating impulse, joined with a wish to gauge the state of her companion's feelings and to test her own self-control. So she might have felt a fierce river current tug at her dipped hand, while she wondered whether she would be able to stand against the stream.

As for Sir Ben, Merle's request found him surprised and rather reluctant. His surprise, however, was less than it would have been under more ordinary circumstances. The accident that just now placed them both within a very measurable distance of drowning seemed to bring one of his past experiences strangely near, as if the wheel of Time had run back with a whirl through the days and years; and that made Merle's reversion to the event appear all the more natural. What struck him as strange was not so much that Dion's fate should be in her mind, as that she should speak to him of it after all the lengthening silence; but her reason was no doubt sufficient. His reluctance was little more than our shrinking from the first entrance upon a subject hitherto by tacit agreement with another person marked "no thoroughfare" in our conversations; since to infringe any such custom is, after a fashion, to concede right of way, a thing charily and jealously done in the pre-

cincts of our minds. Otherwise it did not displease him that she should ask him for details of his household tragedy. It touched him, he thought, nearer than it touched her; and at this time he had become wont to feel inexplicably elated if she showed a casual interest in his most trivial concerns: took up his cartridge pouch and looked into it, or inquired whether he had written to Leopold. In any case, it had so long been Sir Ben's habit to fall in with Merle's wishes, expressed or understood, that to gainsay one of them was a course far from likely to suggest itself; and it did not now.

"Well, Merle," he said, "you know the beginning of it all was some trouble about money matters. I don't suppose you would care for particulars as far as they are concerned."

"No, no, never mind about them," said Merle.

"I'm not at all sure that I could explain the ins and outs of it. I'm no good at things of the kind," said Sir Ben, candidly. "But some investments went wrong, so that we lost a good deal, and you did too. I believe it was nobody's fault. Then a sudden emergency arose. Some mortgage was expiring, and the mortgagees came down on my father unexpectedly, at any rate he was in immediate want of five thousand. Well, I had more than that from my mother, and as I had just come

of age, we settled that I should advance the sum. My father was over in Dublin at that time, and I was up in town with Dion. He and I were nearly of an age, you know, and I remember how sold he was one day when he found out from his guardian that his money was tied up until he was twenty-five. He wished to realise every penny of it, probably because he thought my father might want it. You know the sort of fellow Dion was ; he'd have given his worst enemies the coat off his back if they seemed to be in straits. However, of course, Dion couldn't touch it. By Jove, I recollect he expressed his sentiments on the subject in very forcible language while we were tramping down Gower Street in a hail shower after the interview."

"Why did they do that?" said Merle. "It was a great pity."

"Oh, his father had left it so by will years before. I daresay he thought it prudent, as Dion would have no one but his mother to look after him. Of course it was absurd. If a man can't manage his own affairs before he's twenty-five," said Sir Ben, who had not yet attained to that age, "he's never likely to acquire the art. However, my father urgently wanted the money by a certain day. It was all we could do to get the business settled in time, and Dion, who was just then going over to

Dublin, was to bring it with him. There was some accursed term examination coming on," he said, meaning the epithet so sincerely that he did not feel as if its strength required any apology, "which I didn't want to miss, so I waited for it. We went to get the money at the Bank in the morning. Awful young asses we were in those days. I believe we thought it rather a magnificent transaction. We took it in sovereigns; they seemed more substantial, and we figured to ourselves that there might be some difficulty about English notes in Ireland. And in the evening I went to see Dion off at Euston Square with some other fellow. Who was it?"

"Bernard Dunlop?" Merle suggested, half involuntarily, to expedite matters. Pauses seemed long to her.

Sir Ben looked startled.

"Dunlop? Oh, no. But what on earth do you know about Bernard Dunlop?"

"Oh, I used to hear the name sometimes," said Merle, "that was all."

"Well, we never knew much about him either, but enough to see what an out-and-out scoundrel he was; an uncommonly clever one, too, and liked by every one in a way. They say he might have done anything he pleased, if he had chosen to be moderately respectable, but he distinctly didn't

choose. I believe he was really rather mad. Some people say he eventually went quite off his head, and is in an asylum abroad; at any rate, he has disappeared off the face of the earth, much to its advantage."

Merle listened intently to this little character sketch, and breathed more freely at its conclusion.

"There was a tremendous storm that night," Sir Ben continued; "I went down to Oxford, and the carriage windows were threatening to blow in every minute all the way. It was pitch dark besides, and pouring. When the mail-boat came in at Kingstown next morning, they found Dion's portmanteau and other traps on board, all except the small handbag with the money, which he intended to carry himself—there were no signs of him or of it, though he had been seen going on board at Holyhead. He must have somehow missed his footing, or been shoved over in the crowd. The boat was pitching and rolling tremendously, and on a wild night such a thing might happen easily enough without anybody's being the wiser. It seems most likely that he stumbled near the gangway at Holyhead, as no one remembers having seen him later on. But the certain facts are that he left Holyhead, and never arrived at Kingstown, and one knows what that means."

Merle had for many a day been fighting against

this knowledge, how desperately she had not realised until a few hours ago, when the enemy was marvellously routed by a few feeble scrawls. Now, as she sat by the shimmering green water, and bent low enough over it to draw her fingers through it caressingly, she might have been signing mutely to it that she knew better. It was the only utterance that she could give to the secret which filled her with wrestling delight and dread. The delight was at this moment uppermost.

"Then they telegraphed over for me," said Sir Ben, "and you know what I found. Merle, he'd been watching—my father had—for Dion to come that morning. The money had been promised without fail, that he might have it in time for a business meeting in the afternoon. I suppose he waited and looked out there, alone in his room at the club, until he knew it was too late. The servants said that he seemed much disappointed when they told him the mail was in. He was sitting at the writing-table when they found him dead. He had begun a letter. I know it by heart: '*Dear Ben, I daresay you are very wise to change your mind about that investment.*' I don't know what the doctors may have called it, but his heart broke there. He was all alone; not a friend near him. He might as well have died in the middle of the Great Sahara. And the last thought he had in

his mind was that I wouldn't trust him with a little dirty money."

Merle had turned so white that her face would have been a quite sufficient response, but she spoke without looking up.

"They should never have let you see it. They should have put it out of the way. It was cruel of them."

"That is like a girl all over," said Sir Ben, rather roughly. What is more exasperating than a belated remedy? "If you can hide away anything that's not pleasant to look at, you think it's all right."

His rude speech was a mere mental writhe, but adverse criticism coming from that quarter was a new experience to Merle, and hence it thrust itself upon her notice even now, as something inopportunely disloyal. So she replied with a tinge of resentful bitterness, "I may be like a girl, as you say, but as for things being all right, I think you'd have to hide away the whole world, and everybody in it first."

After this they were silent, rather aggrievedly, for a short time. The little touch of ill-humour lent a sort of every-day atmosphere to the far-off, unhappy things which were in the thoughts of each, and made them seem more vividly real and closely present. But both were too much

preoccupied for quarrelling, and Sir Ben by and by spoke again, his mind still beating on the master-grief to which he had never before given words.

"It was hard lines on me that he should have taken such a thing for granted. Mightn't he have supposed some accidental delay? Heaven knows I was never more pleased at anything in my life than at finding that I could be a help to him in the matter. But if he had believed it, he couldn't have jumped to that conclusion. 'Wise to change your mind'; I often see him writing it, the old governor. And he needn't have thought it of me, by Jove, he needn't!"

"Perhaps he had been told so," said Merle, low and hurriedly, as she might have spoken under the curven white lip of an impending avalanche.

"Who was there to tell him such an atrocious lie?" said Sir Ben.

But Merle kept silence as strictly as if her answer would have enveloped them in the rush of the smothering thunder.

"Do you know, Merle," he went on, "when I think of it all I'm sometimes brute almost enough to rage at Dion for losing his life in doing the errand. I suppose one's hankering after somebody to blame for our misfortunes could scarcely go much further than that."

"But when you consider it as an accident——" Merle began.

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, "to be sure I do. When I'm in my right mind, I'm only inclined to knock my own head against a wall for letting a tomfool examination keep me from coming over myself."

"But, Ben, Ben," said Merle, sitting up straight and facing him desperately, "what would you think if——"

"Merle, dear, what *is* the matter? You look scared—you look like a ghost," he said, in much concern. "You'll catch cold waiting here so long. Would you have more shelter, I wonder, on the other side?"

But for all answer a shadow of new fear passed over her face, like a cloud blotting out a cloud. And directly afterwards she said in a relieved tone, as if welcoming a respite, "Ah, here's Mr. Kerrigan."

MERLE KNOWS

Uncertain Shining—Farmer-Fishers—"A Lazy Lot"—A Communist—Kerrigan's Chum—For Gold and Diamonds—A Forced March—Hard Lines—Paddy Again

CHAPTER XI

MERLE KNOWS

KERRIGAN had not wished his appearance to be observed. Naturally, he being a person who, if fernseed had retained its virtue until his day, would have carried about a supply with him as invariably as the most confirmed snuffer his box of biting dust. Moreover, he had accepted the neighbour's sweetheart theory with respect to Miss Merle and Sir Ben, and this now made him all the less willing to break in upon them when they were talking together so appropriately. He viewed the probability that they were "coortin'" with some interest and complacency, because the arrangement seemed likely to further a project which had occurred to him in the boat shortly before Paddy Mack's disquieting revelations. But his anxiety to pass by unperceived defeated itself, since while glancing furtively over his shoulder to see whether he were noticed, a stumble set a loose stone rolling to his betrayal. So as he had

to halt, and would on no account sit down, he compromised the matter by standing awkwardly against an adjacent rock.

"I stepped round to see was there a sign of anything putting out over yonder; there ought to be by now, if they're intending to do a hand's turn at the fishing to-day at all," he said, discontentedly; "but like enough they're not. It's getting to look a bit hazy and thick out to sea though, so the others may be running in. Good people are scarce; they're mighty careful of themselves in bad weather."

"Well, small blame to them for that," said Sir Ben, "considering the general seaworthiness of their fleet. I suppose Paddy's still tinkering away at the boat?"

"Ay, the young ass, and might as well let it alone. He'll make nothing of it. I was telling him he might better stuff his own fool's head in the hole."

"I never saw anybody look so much disconcerted as he did when we were landing here," said Merle, wishing to suggest an extenuating feature in Paddy's case. "If he had been handing one out of the bottom of the bay he could scarcely have put on a more apologetic expression."

"I'd disconcert him," said Kerrigan, with a gloomy grimness. He was annoyed to see no

boats coming about, for he misliked the aspect which the weather had begun to assume. "The uncertain shining of an April day" is perhaps especially uncertain over the sea-shouldering crags and fissuring creeks round about Glenore; and signs were just now apparent which to an experienced eye betokened its untimely withdrawal. These signs were not overtly menacing. Air and water were still clear and tranquil; only now and then a waft of dulness would steal across the crystal-grey floor, like a breath dimming a mirror; and when this had melted off, there followed in its wake a faint heaving motion, not the brisk rippling and bickering roused by a breeze, but a suppressed shudder, running beneath the surface to cause a slow swinging and swaying at the margin, as if it were the last trace of some huge, distant eddy. This, conjoined with the cobwebby haze which he had noticed gathering about the mouth of the bay, led Kerrigan to surmise that the present calm was not destined to long duration. He did not care to announce these apprehensions, but they somewhat inconsistently embittered his strictures upon the dilatoriness of the Glenore fisherfolk. Prudence is always so liable to be called "out of its name" when its exercise by others jeopardises our own interest.

Glenore the village, far enough away to be only

a picturesque scattering of white gleams capped with golden, lay sunning itself serenely in its frame of green and russet and blue. The trees about the Big House were still so thinly leaved as to form softly powdered purple brown masses, and where they climbed over a sloping ridge, small woodland lawns glinted out among them like jewels held up to the light. Along the shore the little square fields shone like quarrelets of beryl and emerald. There was nothing in their dainty mosaic to suggest that they were the scene of hard struggle and toil, and the centre of hopes piteous alike in fulfilment and in frustration.

But Merle knew them at close quarters, with their painfully piled-up stone cairns and patches of labour-baffling swamp. She had seen how persistently the white skeleton crept from under its meagre coverlid, and how the wet moss and rushes would encroach on the "bit of lan'," too straitly bounded without them. And she had heard from sundry anxious-looking joint-proprietresses how "Himself was heart-scalded over his pitaty sowin'; there was two fut deep of wather lyin' between the drills these three weeks." Or that, "If, plase God, the few oats they'd tried in the corner where the turnips failed on them, got a chance to ripen at all, they might maybe make out the rint yet, or else it 'ud be a bad job come Michaelmas." Now, as

her eyes rested mournfully upon the flecks of vivid colour which represented the Gallahers' and Nolans' and Carrolls' holdings, these and other such scraps of history came into her mind.

It was a relief, indeed, to loosen her grasp of some facts which she had just been learning. Old Sir Ben's unfinished letter, for instance, and young Sir Ben's meditations thereupon, which seemed scarcely more likely to find an end—these were new ideas so sharp of edge that her impulse was to drop them as if they had been a sheaf of naked blades thrust into her hand. Not that she could take up any but sad thoughts in exchange. The mood left by this pause in her sorrowful agitation was one which quickened her sense of world-wide care and grief, as a fever sharpens the hearing, and the tragic element in her neighbours' lot was borne in upon her as she sat with hands clasping knees in the attitude of a weary old crone, and gazed before her with melancholy, dark eyes. It somehow seemed to her a bad omen for their impending interview that Kerrigan spoke harshly of these poor Glenore folk, and showed no disposition to make allowances for the disadvantages under which they laboured in their farming and fishing, and general conduct of affairs. She wished just then to think of him as a person who would use much patience and forbearance in his dealings with a

weaker comrade in adversity, and she found it more difficult to maintain this view when she heard him express such sentiments as, "Faith they're a lazy lot. The fish might be leppin' on shore like frogs under their eyes before they'd take the trouble to put out a rag of a net. They'd sooner sit around on the top of the fences like so many crows, and watch the weeds smothering the crops. That's the sort they are, every mother's son of them."

"I wish," she said at last, with a flicker of perversity—"I wish that they never had to go out fishing at all. I wish they all had land enough to make their living on, for certainly they do the best they can with the shreds they've got. It's a pity that they should be pushed out into the sea, when there's really plenty of room for them, and everybody else, on shore. Look at those empty fields over there. What use are they to any one? Perhaps a few beasts graze on them now and then, and perhaps there is some man who likes to think that the property belongs to him. If I had the managing of things he might just put that idea out of his head, because the people who wanted to do something with the land should have it. Why should one man stick his house down in the middle of a great green park, and let nobody live within three miles of him, while half a dozen others are

huddled together in huts on a patch not the size of his lawn-tennis court, and can't feed a goat without trespassing? Why, for any good the country is to them, they might as well live on a bit of rock like this, with nothing but water round them. I think that everybody should have as much land as he actually wanted in the first place, and what was left over would do for parks. It wouldn't matter if they had to be a few sizes smaller. Then there'd be no occasion for the people to go out fishing, unless they chose, and they could get themselves proper boats too."

Kerrigan listened with a certain amount of surprised dissatisfaction while Merle propounded her exceedingly crude scheme for showing the heavens more just. The amount, however, was strictly limited by his humble estimate of womankind's capacity for talking sense, and it seemed to him that the simplest form of *argumentum ad hominem* would meet the present case.

"If they don't choose to come out fishing to-day," he said, "I don't precisely see that we've much chance to get off of this here Inish."

He had no sooner spoken than he perceived that he had blundered in presenting an alarming view of the situation to Miss Merle, from whom it was presumably right, and undoubtedly expedient, to conceal any cause for the fears of which she might

be supposed inconveniently capable. Sir Ben's slightly overdone tone of confidence in asserting, "Oh, we'll get home fast enough," only made him the more keenly alive to his mistake. It was in his haste to gloss it over by a prompt change of subject that he hit upon Johnny Day's queer bit of writing as a safe impersonal topic, and forthwith blurted out—

"Did you get the bit of paper, Miss Merle, that I was after sending up to you last night?"

"Yes, yes, but I haven't quite finished reading it yet," said Merle, quickly. "I haven't had time —I——"

Now that the longed-for opportunity had come, it terrified her utterly. She felt as if she were about to hear some tidings from the other world—an experience which must be awful, even if the news were good, and a great doubt of this gripped hold of her. The misgiving grew all the stronger because at that moment a cloud was drifting over the sun, and a moan of wind swept by, and the water began to lap and gurgle louder in the wet chinks between the rocks. The light, slidden away in silver sheets, and the chilly breath on her face, and the sighing wail that came with it, seemed harbingers of woe. A presentiment warned her that some evil was to befall her on this ugly little reef, and the fact that an accident

compelled her to meet a crisis of her fate there foreshadowed a calamitous issue. Delay, at which not many minutes before she had been chafing bitterly, would now have come to her as a merciful reprieve, but though a word might have steered the talk away from the fearful theme, she could not utter it. All the presence of mind and nimbleness of wit, which she could have commanded on any trivial emergency, fled panic stricken from her at this sore pinch, and left her sitting spell-bound by the threshold of a door that at any instant might open on life or death.

For Kerrigan was disposed to keep in this harmless conversational track, the rather, perhaps, because the incidents of the morning were more like a bit of his rough colonial life than anything he had experienced since his return to civilisation, and thus carried his thoughts back to the adventurous past.

"That's Johnny Day's letter, or whatever it is," he said to Sir Ben. "I don't know, sir, whether I ever happened to mention him to you—a chap who chummed along with me in one big tramp I had through the bush up beyond Ballarat?"

"Was it the time you were so near coming to grief, and were rescued by a camel corps?" said Sir Ben. "I think I remember you just mentioned it once, but that was all."

Kerrigan's uncertainty had been in truth, so to speak, rhetorical, as he well knew that he had always avoided the subject.

"So near, only so *near*," Merle said to herself, groping for gleams of hope.

"That was the time," said Kerrigan; "and about the worst spell, too, that ever I put in, what with one thing and another—the lad mostly. Ay, we'd never have got into the hobble we did, only that he was no more fit for knocking about in the bush than—well, than you are yourself, or maybe less."

"Thanks," said Sir Ben.

"You see, he came of gentlefolks," said Kerrigan; "that was plain enough, though he was stone broke when I ran across him; scarce a shoe to his foot and his clothes hanging on and off him like a scarecrow's, between rags and starvation. By jingo, I used to think his people would have felt queer to see the sight he was, supposing he had any belonging to him—the chances are he had, though he hardly ever said a word about anything of the sort. He might have dropped out of the sky, or riz up on the ground like a mushroom, for any talk he had back of yesterday or the day before. He'd left some trouble behind him wherever he'd come from, I'll bet."

"Got into deep water over here, I daresay," said Sir Ben.

"Like enough. He'd have had a better chance now, if he'd enlisted; and so I used to be telling him, for he was the makings of a fine upstanding man, and he knew how to ride a horse—it was about the only sensible thing he could do worth a cent. But, goodness help him, the notion he had was gold and diamonds. Thought he was going to gather up a great fortune in a couple of weeks or so, once he got to the new mines they were booming just then, up beyond Waimonoura; it's that he was after when I fell in with him. Such things happen now and again, of course; but he made no manner of doubt of it. He was a young chap, to be sure, but he was uncommon hopeful even for that, until he knocked up, by worse luck, just about the ugliest bit of country we came to, with our water running short, and the only chance the two of us had in the world to push on the smartest we could."

"That was a bad job," said Sir Ben.

"You may call it so. Bedad! when the last of the horses gave in, I'd have bet you anything you could name that we were done for altogether; for I saw 'twould be the most a strong man could do to clear out of it, tramping all he knew. And sure every mile Day got over, I could have walked backwards and forwards, and back again, and have had to wait for him at the heel of the hunt. So

what chance had we? Not but what he was always at me to go on ahead on my own hook, and leave him to shift for himself. He said he'd do grandly, the cratur; he looked it. I wasn't exactly thinking of leaving him to the vultures. But I remember one evening, coming near sunset, he'd lain down dead beat under a thorn-bush, and gone asleep; so I went on a bit to prospect around from the next ridge, and see was there a sign of anything at all, which there wasn't. But 'twas further than I thought, and I stopped away something longer than I'd intended, and by the time I got back he'd woke up and missed me. I do believe the lad thought I'd took him at his word, and gone off for good—I'm morally certain he did. Sitting up he was, staring away in front of him, dazed like. I came up close to him before he saw or heard me, and the sort of look he had on him I've never forgotten. He didn't let on he'd been thinking of anything in partic'lar, but all the while he was fit to cry, he was so gratified not to be left alone; he was so. Much notion I had, if he'd only known. My soul to the saints, if I believe the devil himself 'ud rest easy in his own place with such a cruel villain's trick on his conscience."

"I don't know about the devil," said Sir Ben; "he must be pretty well case-hardened by this time, by all accounts. But you wouldn't, at any rate."

"I've recollections enough as it is to make me rest uneasy," said Kerrigan, "when I think of the trouble there was getting him along. Many's the time I've had the driving of a mob of sheep, or cattle, or horses, through places where you must keep them going, fit or no, if you want to save their lives; and it's ugly work when it's only a matter of brute beasts. But when it comes to human beings, it's devilment entirely. Lord forgive me, the hours I in a manner drove him along, when he wasn't rightly able to set one foot before the other. And I'd be grudging the bits of rests he took when he was fairly done. Those times, he'd often get out that writing paper of his, and set to scrawling something on it; but even that he couldn't do. I don't believe he ever finished it. And as things turned out, I might as well and better have let him be, instead of tormenting him."

Kerrigan was more or less thinking aloud, and his thoughts here happened to go on for a short time without words. The hiatus seemed very long to one of his hearers.

"It made no differ," he resumed, "for one morning he just dropped down dead off his feet. And that same night the exploring party came along and found us—found me. As for him, they needn't have come at all, since they didn't come half a dozen hours sooner."

"Hard lines, by Jove!" said Sir Ben.

Merle heard the sound of his voice, but it conveyed no more meaning to her than if it had been the sea and the waves roaring. The tense eagerness of her listening had snapped like a strained bowstring. All the words in the world could tell her nothing more than this, which she seemed to have always known, and to heed wonderfully little now. It was several minutes afterwards that she became aware of Sir Ben shaking her by the shoulder. He had spoken to her three times, and was half puzzled and half alarmed by her deafness.

"Had you gone asleep, Merle?" he said, in a relieved tone, when she looked up.

"Oh, no, I was—I was watching a little crab running about in the pool here," she said. "Is it time to be going home?"

But before he could answer an interruption occurred. Paddy Mack's face, in its halo of black hat-brim, rose up over the boulders behind them, and said, "Mr. Kerrigan, sir—och, your Honour, d'ye know what I'm after doin'?"

THE UNFINISHED LETTER

Tide and Wind—A Chance the More—Waiting on the Inish—Johnny Day's Letter—A Boon to Humanity—Bad Luck—In the Bush—Evil Dreams—"As soon as I can"

CHAPTER XII

THE UNFINISHED LETTER

PADDY'S manner showed that what he was "after doin'" appeared to him a matter of grave import, and the two men hastily joined him to investigate. He was standing in evident consternation on the tiny plateau of rock near the boat. The rising wind made his hat-brim flap wildly, and fluttered a weather-beaten red woollen scarf, which was wisped round his throat, and his countenance, glimpsing between these, looked fixedly dismayed.

"I'd forgotten the bastely spring-tide," he said, "cliver and clane forgot it till this minute of time."

"And what about it now?" said Kerrigan. "The moon's new, sure enough."

"'Twill be an oncommon high ould one," said Paddy. "When the tide drains out wid itself beyant the rocks fornent Dan Hennessy's, it comes back over the wall of our bit of field, as certain as

fate. And now that I remember myself, they were as dry as ould tay-leaves this mornin' early, and our drills were all of a slop, like as if the say had been givin' a rinse through them."

"And supposing it was, what's the odds?" said Kerrigan, unsympathetically. "You've made fool enough of yourself for one day, without coming blathering about a sup of sea-water getting into your place, as if it was the world's end." He was much disgusted at the failure of the expedition, which had originated in his desire to entertain his Quality, and for which he felt to some extent responsible. Hence his stern attitude towards the scatter-brained Paddy.

"But musha good gracious, Mr. Kerrigan," said Paddy, solemnly, "when we've anythin' of an out-of-the-way high tide, there does be as much as four or five fut depth of wather over that"—he pointed to the highest elevation of Inish Clog-hawn, a jagged splinter of blackish stone—"begorra, there's little wet puddles lyin' yet in every one of the holes there this minute; I've just been lookin'."

"Are you sure of this?" said Sir Ben.

"Wisha then, certain sure, your Honour, and bad luck to it," said Paddy. "More betoken, look at the way it's flowed in on us since we came here, and it's scarce two hours turned. And the

win's takin' on itself to rise up along wid it, and 'ill be flourishin' the waves twyst the height they'd raich if they were let alone. Ay, bedad, it's soft enough the say's gettin'."

They looked about them, and their faces seemed to reflect Paddy's expression of dismay. The tide was evidently rising very fast. Some of the dark-weeded rocks had already ducked their heads under water, and the heavy wrack manes of others were floating spread out flatly on the surface. And all around the little platform on which they stood, the air was full of the liquid murmur and rustle that comes with a widening sweep of ocean's skirts. An adverse change, too, had come over the weather. The clouds, which had but now trooped off to seaward, were hurrying back, with reinforcements, and in much disorder. Tangled trails of murky grey shifted and writhed against a sky-line blurred with ashen haze. Here and there they were smoothed into the sharp-outlined slant which betokens falling showers. But steadily through all these sailed on a great round-plumed mass of paler cloud, drifting so low that it seemed to ruffle up the water before it, like the breast of some vast swimming bird, while the gusts plucked off feathery flakes, and teased them into scudding filaments. Close at hand, the heaving olive-grey expanse was still unflecked by foam; but white

crests were thickening and tossing to seaward; the furthest off looked like chips flawing a dull green marble slab.

"What's to be done, then?" said Sir Ben. The situation was too serious for comments upon anybody's intellectual capacity, and Paddy's depression deepened by several degrees because no one called him names.

"It's liker than not," he said, "that some of the lads 'ill be runnin' in before the tide's anyways full, and they'd take us off. But I've plugged up the leak desperit wid me ould coateen stuffed full of weeds and such, and she might keep afloat under us while his Honour and me were rowin' across to the point there—I think she might that far. And Mat Greer has his two good boats lyin' there most whiles. If we got over at all, we could be takin' one of them, and fetchin' back here in plenty of time for her young ladyship. I'd go be meself and welcome, on'y wid but one hand to the oars 'twould be no use makin' an offer at it. We must knock the walk out of her, if we're to have e'er a chance."

"Look alive then, and get ready," said Sir Ben; "I must speak to Miss Merle."

"It's I that am going, of course," said Kerrigan.

"Sure not at all," protested Paddy, "you that I've heard sayin' you haven't pulled a stroke these

last twenty year. An ould cat 'ud make as good a hand at it at the end of an oar. His Honour now isn't too bad altogether considerin'." Sir Ben, who had rowed for his College, was not at leisure to appreciate this high compliment.

"Don't attend to the young ass, sir," said Kerrigan to Sir Ben; "of course you'll be keeping Miss Merle content until we're back. But there'll be a boat passing first."

"You'll see her safe on board any tolerable one that comes," said Sir Ben; "I'll explain to her how it is. *You* going with Paddy, Kerrigan? Nonsense, that wouldn't do at all."

"'Twould make no sort of differ to mortal man or woman," said Kerrigan, "whether I was above water or under it. That's a fact. But, sir, you've Miss Merle here, and all your own people over there, and everything else to consider. That's only sense and reason, and don't you go against it."

"Look here, Kerrigan," said Sir Ben, as he passed, "don't you see it's just to give her a better chance? Do you suppose I'd let you, or any man, keep me out of it?"

Kerrigan saw that he might as well leave off supposing so. "I'd give the worth of creation," he said half to himself, "to see the two of you safe on shore."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if you did presently,"

said Sir Ben, "only—I say, Kerrigan, if this unchancy fog thickens much more, how are you to keep a look-out for a boat? Perhaps I'm leaving her to drown by inches, and it would be better to take her with us at all risks. What do you say, Kerrigan?"

Kerrigan considered, but only for a moment. "It 'ill be a terrible risky thing," he said, "trusting that way to a wad of old rags. And I wouldn't say there was much fear but that the fishing boats 'ill be passing time enough and to spare, as the young bosthoon there says; I've seen them coming in dozens of times. I wish to God you'd stop where you are, or at any rate wait a bit."

"No, no—it certainly gives her a chance the more. The wind's getting up, too, and the sooner we're off the better. If we get across, it will be all right, and if not, she'll be no worse off than she is now; so it can't do any harm, however it turns out," said Sir Ben, who was considering the matter from a completely one-sided point of view.

He shifted that point discreetly, however, in communicating his intention to Merle, whom he found standing, a slender blue figure crowned with a coiled gleam of golden-brown, at gaze over the wide sea. Watching for a boat he supposed wrongly.

"I'm just going to run across with Paddy, and

fetch another boat," he said. "It's beginning to look like rain, and there's no use waiting here to be ducked. You couldn't come with us, Merle, because this boat's so leaky and sloppy, you might get rather wet"—he felt grimly conscious of the understatement—"but you'll be all right here with Kerrigan, and we won't be long, I hope."

"Oh, there's no hurry, is there?" said Merle. Her strongest sensation was a vague wonder that anybody should take the trouble to do anything in particular. But in a few moments this shifted into an equally vague surprise at the length and earnestness of the look with which Ben was regarding her. He was, in fact, thinking how very probably he might never see her again, and finding it hard to go away without a sign.

"If one of the fishing boats passes before we come back, you'll go home in it," he said; "it would be better not to miss the chance, in case of rain, you know. But Kerrigan will see to that. I hope and trust it will keep off," he said, fervently, using this aspiration as a periphrasis for several others.

"Oh, it will be all right," said Merle, indifferently. If anything, she rather wished that he would go away. A sound of bumping and scraping showed that the boat was ready, and Sir Ben knew it behoved him not to linger. "You may be sure

that I'll come back to you, Merle, the first minute that I can," he said. But as he spoke, she shrank back from him, and turned away quickly, saying something which a ruffle of wind passing between them made indistinct. He thought she had said, Oh, don't, don't!" and as he pulled out among the swaying furrows, he was much occupied with speculations as to what the words might have meant. Did she wish him to stay? or had she somehow divined the feeling which made him bitterly loth to leave her without so much as touching her hand? Far beyond the reach of his conjectures was the truth: that he had unawares repeated the sentence which not many minutes before was ringing a wild peal over her new hope, but which now, all hope being dead, jarred as mockingly as joy-bells mingled with a funeral dirge.

Be this as it might, Sir Ben, while he continued to fix his eyes on the receding rock-fleck, believed that it dwindled visibly with every wash of the waves; and he leaned so hard on his strokes that Paddy said, "Aisy a bit, your Honour; you're pullin' us a trifle too much up agin the say."

Paddy's spirits had recovered slightly since they started, for he had some faith in his handiwork, and where that consolation came short, he pieced it out with the thought that perhaps at worst his

own *stookawn's* head might be the only one to go down. With this in his mind, he added wistfully, "If you was equally so powerful at the swimmin' as at the rowin', your Honour, you might ready enough make the shore, even if she settled to sink on us presently."

"But I'm nothing of a swimmer at all," said Sir Ben; "are you?"

"Is it meself?" said Paddy. "Och, for that matter, no more than a pig, or an ould hin." And his dejection again increased.

Kerrigan stood looking ruefully after the black boat as it plunged through the dimmed water, which had begun to roll in heavy wide-curved ridges. He thought they were rowing very slowly, and he fancied that the boat was cowering lower and lower, as if some invisible weight pressed her down among the muffling foam-fleeces. He remembered the gaping leak, and every moment dreaded to see her disappear. This watch was shortened for him by the intervention of a thick white mist, which came swiftly skimming in from the sea, and blotted out the shore, and lapped the boat in one of its folds. But even then he was fain to peer awhile longer for glimpses amid the elusive swirls; and he went through some horrible moments, when he could see nothing in a rift where he had calculated that the boat must be.

It seemed a long time to him before he made up his mind that the vapour-screen had become quite impenetrable. He was glad that Miss Merle had sat down on the other side of the rock, and did not share his suspense. "Every minute she bides content in her mind, is so much the better got of misfortune," he reflected philosophically.

Merle was, indeed, at a very safe distance from the scene of his anxieties. She had taken out Johnny Day's letter, and was reading it once again in the pitiless light that had broken upon her. She crouched low over the paper spread out on her knees, for the wind was at her elbow, ready to twitch the fluttering sheet away.

The manuscript which had baffled Kerrigan and his friend was Greek, pencilled in part, and in some places so hopelessly obliterated that to pore over it availed nothing. But the beginning, written with pen and ink, remained fairly legible. It had neither date nor address, and ran: "MY DEAR MERLE,—You will have heard of me long before this, as I wrote to my guardian the day I left Monte Carlo, and Bernard Dunlop was to post it for me there. I wrote, of course, to tell him that he must at once pay over that £5,000 to Uncle Ben; and I really had some satisfaction in thinking how he would have to hand it out after all, if he was twice as pig-headed, which could hardly

be. But I want to tell you just how the thing happened. You must have heard me speak of Bernard Dunlop? He is out and out the cleverest fellow I know. I daresay there is not a cleverer man in Europe, but he has always had miserable luck; otherwise he would be one of the richest too. Well, last winter he told me, in confidence, about a most wonderfully ingenious method which he had invented, by means of which anybody who understood it would be able to win invariably in every kind of game of chance. Perfectly honourable and fair it was; the details are rather intricate, but it can be proved, scientifically worked out, and solved like an algebraical equation or a problem in mathematics. I never was much good at such things. The only difficulty was that a considerable sum—a thousand or so—would be necessary to start with. Dunlop and I often talked it over at his rooms, and as he naturally did not want his discovery to get wind prematurely, how to raise the wind was rather a crux. However, as I would be one-and-twenty in a month or two, I thought we'd be all right then, and we settled that I should advance £2,000, and that we should go halves in the profits—a splendid bargain for me. What we meant to do was to go in the first place to Monte Carlo, break the bank there as often as we liked, and so on; and after that do what seemed best

about publishing our system. Dunlop believed that it would probably result in putting an end to gambling all over the world; he said it would be a boon to humanity, and it was that he was chiefly set on; but, to tell you the truth, I thought most of the money. I imagined shovelling up francs and napoleons by the million, and coming home straight to set Uncle Ben clear from all those abominable worries, and to live together like Rothschilds for ever after. And, Merle, by this time there might have been a Kuria Ionidou, and no Merle Clariston in existence. It drives one demented to think how we were within a wheel's turn of all that.

"Well, one day early last spring, I interviewed my guardian about getting the money—I daresay Ben remembers—and found he would do nothing but sit there grinning like an idiot and say, 'My dear boy, what you wish is simply out of the question.' It's lucky for him that that was the case, for one of the things I wished was to smash his head. And just about that time, as you know, I was to bring over the money to Uncle Ben. I got down to Holyhead all right; but when I went on board the mail-boat, the first thing I found was that I had left the bag with the sovereigns in the railway carriage. I rushed back to get it, but they had shunted the train off somewhere miles

down the platform. It was ages before I hit upon the right compartment, and when I got back to the pier—it was a black wet night, and blowing like mad—the gangway was up, and the boat clearing out of the harbour, hooting like a steam screech-owl.

"The idea came into my head then all in a flash, as I stood there with the bag in my hand. I knew that Dunlop was to start for Monte Carlo next morning from Liverpool. He had got together a hundred or so—not near enough to give his scheme a fair trial—and it seemed to me that I would be a great fool to let the chance go. Besides that I had almost promised him to let him have the money. I made up my mind on the spot. I took the next train to Liverpool, and I telegraphed to Uncle Ben that there was a change of plan, and there might be a little delay in sending the sum he expected. I tell you, Merle, I was as sure as I am of my own name that I should have ten times as much for him within a few days; and so I should, only for the most extraordinary run of bad luck.

"I waited in the garden outside the Casino while Dunlop was playing; we thought it better that only one should appear in the saloon, lest there might be a suspicion of some confederate trick. I think I'll hate the sight of flowers and fountains and white marble pillars all the days of my life, for

they were blazing away in the sun there when poor Dunlop came out to tell me how the whole thing had gone smash somehow, quite inexplicably, just on the brink of complete success, and he had lost every penny except a few pounds that he had set aside in case of accidents. He is a right good fellow. I believe he kept hardly a farthing for himself; he insisted on giving me the rest. There happened to be an Australian steamer sailing next day from Brindisi, and he strongly advised me to take my passage in her—I am writing on board. It is evident from the latest reports of the new gold and diamond finds, that there are magnificent prospects for anybody who can get out fast enough. Dunlop said there was no reason why a fellow might not be home again with his fortune made in six months, and six months will soon slip by. He had other plans for himself, unluckily for me, so I had to come alone. I left a letter with him, as I said, to explain matters to you all. I don't suppose the delay of a few days could possibly make much difference to Uncle Ben. But of course I could never think of coming home until I have done something to show them that I am not an ass.

"So here I am arrived in Australia, where I hope not to stay many months, at any rate. Things here are not quite so flourishing just now

as they were when I started, and the mines, it seems, are an immense distance from everywhere. However, once I get there it will be all right, and I set off up country to-morrow. I have translated my name for the time being into 'Johnny Day,' which does very well and sounds much the same."

At this point the pen and ink failed, and the remaining entries, roughly pencilled, were brief, as mechanical difficulties had originally made them, and now further curtailed by many illegible passages. The first decipherable sentence had evidently been written after some days' experience of the amenities of the bush. "We have been having rather a rough time of it, great heat and water running short. One of the horses died last night, poor brute. The man I am with is a queer sort of fellow, silent and rather surly, I think; but he seems to know the bush well, and expects to come on some pools before long. . . . No signs of water yet. All the poor wretches of horses are dead now, which is so much the better for them. I wonder, by the way, what they ever gained by being alive. I have run a thorn into my foot, and lamed myself, which doesn't mend matters. . . . There were some beautiful black clouds about this morning, and we made sure of rain, but had not a drop. When I get to sleep, I always begin dreaming of the fountains in those hideous Monte Carlo

gardens. Then poor Dunlop comes up with his long face, and turns into Kerrigan shaking me up, and saying it is time to go on again. The sunshine is like a great wall of fire all round you ; it takes your breath away when you begin to move through it. . . . I am afraid I must be an awful drag on Kerrigan, though he declares he couldn't travel a bit faster without me. If I am to come to an end here, I hope it will happen before it is too late for him. . . . No water yet ; things look black enough. We can't hold out much longer. Still we may come on some before night, and then we will be all right, and after that the diamonds and gold. . . . But you may be sure that I'll come back to you, Merle, as soon as I can get a chance."

A SECRET KEPT

Forecasts—Conflicting Claims—Mist—Beyond the Mist—"A Fine Flowing Tide"—For Living's Sake—No Alternative —Out of her Hands

CHAPTER XIII

A SECRET KEPT

THAT was all. Merle read it through quickly, but she sat for a long time without looking up. She was not thinking any definite thoughts about Dion and his pitiful fate; that memory would be the atmosphere of her mind, tingeing whatever entered it. Now all the years of her future were drifting before her, as fast as the interminable procession of cloud-rack was sweeping over her head, and, like the rushing miles of hodden-grey vapour, their passage showed only a restless monotony. A vast dreary weariness, as it were, a benumbing mist of the faculties, had settled down upon her, and through it she felt dimly that she was forsaken and bereft. The glimmer of hope, by which she had walked so long, had been very faint, and even the brighter gleam that had marvellously leaped up a few hours ago had flickered unceasingly in gusts of fear. Still the quenching of the last spark is ever the visible

victory of darkness over light, and turns all forward-looking thoughts into a bewildered groping through despair.

As she sat stunned and passive, some sharply defined troubles began to detach themselves from the confused cloud of sorrow. Foremost among them came old Sir Ben's last letter, and the thorn which it had left rankling in his son's life. She said to herself that for this reason Ben must be told of Dion's telegram, since it accounted for his father's words in a somewhat less painful way than he had thought possible. But that would involve the whole story, and how could she tell this thing of Dion? Merle's knowledge of the world was small, even considering her twenty years, yet she recognised in the facts evidence of a palpable snare successfully spread. And then the insane breach of trust. "He was so young, so young," she said to herself. And now that he could never have a chance of retrieving his false step, she surely was not called upon to publish it, and perhaps enable indifferent people to sneer and condemn—people who were not worthy to speak of him at all, if they only knew. Merle felt a thrill of wrath against the whole respectable, prudent, well-conducted world. "I should begin to hate any one that I thought was blaming him," she reflected with a gloomy prescience. And thereupon she recalled Sir Ben's

indignant question: "Who could have told such a lie?" Who indeed! "He would have come back to me," she said, "and if he had come after fifty years, a miserable old convict, in rags, like the tramps on the road, he'd have found me waiting for him." But then, again, Ben's grief-stricken face rose up before her, and compelled her to doubt whether she could keep silence without cruel self-reproach.

This trouble led her by a natural transition to another. For Ben's face had that day revealed something which warned her that she need no longer look to him for the old comfortable friendliness, but must henceforth reckon upon meeting what she could only turn away from with a movement half indignant, half compunctious, and wholly painful. Loss, and harassment, and perplexity seemed, indeed, to emerge from the general mist of sadness, and affront her harshly wherever she turned, until at last she was aroused by a cold touch on her listlessly drooping hand. It made her think of her terrier Rory, and, glancing down, she would scarcely have been surprised to encounter his wag and grin.

Of course it was not Rory, who, in point of fact, was at that moment some miles away, perseveringly watching for her return, with his black nose thrust between the inconveniently close bars of the little

side gate. It was the lip of a clear water-swirl, which had just swept into a rock-hollow beside her, and, swelled by rapidly increasing refluxes, circled up to the edge of the little basin. Even as she looked it filled and overflowed, merging two pools into one, and momentarily spreading with a rougher rippled surface.

Merle sat up and looked about her, but not very far, because, since she last noticed her surroundings, the sea fog had swept up stealthy and swift, and now shut in the Inish as if a great white tent had been erected over it. The thick folds swayed and waved and trailed to and fro on the tumbling floor, but they never lifted, and half a dozen vigorous oar-strokes would have crossed the space they enclosed. Only to seaward a doorway opened stormily on a throng of darker clouds, vaporous Jostling Rocks, wind-driven together and asunder, in reeling masses, and at the same time borne along without pause, flinging down before them a circle of shadowy gloom, where the leaping foam-lines broke into fiercer gleams. Against the Inish itself, the water which had been flowing by with soft sounds and motions, lapping and sighing, now began to dash itself roughly in waves that seethed at their curved edges, and fell with a thud and boom. And the Inish—what had become of Inish Cloghawn, all but a vanishing remnant? A wide-

washing eddy that spun gurgling at her feet suggested an answer.

But Merle was not very quick to take in the situation, her mind being preoccupied and oppressed. Only by degrees she began to connect the fact that the tide was rising rapidly with the fact that she had at present absolutely no means of retreating before its encroachments, however far they might be pushed. Then it did occur to her with a startling clearness that Ben's hurried departure, in quest of a boat, betokened his belief in urgent reasons for speedily quitting the Inish ; else he would never have gone off and left her. Suppose the tide went on rising, and he did not come back in time ? The first sensation which this hypothesis caused her was a quiver of fear, as instinctive as an eye-blink at a lightning-flash. Yet in another minute her uppermost thought was that perhaps she would not have to waken next morning, a moment which experience had taught her to dread as the pounce of an ambushed wild beast. Both feelings, however, receded promptly as her habit of relying upon masculine judgment in the conduct of out-of-door matters reasserted itself, and she considered that, if Ben had had any doubts, he would certainly have taken her with him, even at the risk of wet feet.

Yet, though she might dismiss the idea as a

practical probability, it had given a trend to her thoughts, which she continued to follow. Sitting with bowed head, she pondered over all the dreariness that lay waiting her behind yonder curtain of white mist, stored up in days where the old hope would be no more seen, and the old fear would have turned into a grief, envenomed, whether she spoke or kept silence, by remorseful pangs. For the longer she thought, the more keenly she realised the misery of revealing Dion's fate, and the impossibility of preserving the secret. Ben's interests forbade this, as well as Dion's own frustrated purpose of restitution. That wretched man had of course suppressed the explanatory letter. And the outcome of her brooding was a strengthening conviction that suffering would be spared to others as well as herself if she never returned to take up the weariful burden of life. Few voices arose in her memory to protest against that conclusion. An orphaned only child, Merle had no friends who came very near. Probably she liked nobody in the world better than her Aunt Etta, so kind and sometimes so absurd, and her old friends and playfellows, Ben and Leo—of the two Leo was her favourite. Her vanishing out of their lives would move but a modern lamentation. Even Rory would console himself after certain expectant days. Or if Ben—Merle reverted with a loathful

recollection to her new enlightenment on that point —this only made the dim humming water-depths, and the shrouding mists, and the quietude which must abide there, seem to her all the more a refuge and a deliverance. She hardly knew whether Ben would repel her most as a lover of herself or as a stern judge of Dion, but neither anticipation was endurable. Merle moved impatiently as she thought of it, and the arm on which she leaned slipped, so that her hand and wrist were plunged into the brimming pool. Something clammy and clinging twined about her fingers as she drew them out; it was a blade of slimy green sea-grass. She shook it off with a shudder, and rose to her feet. As she did so she found that Kerrigan was close behind her, having, in fact, now nowhere else to stand. He was busily lifting shingle stones out of the shallow water, and piling them on a little rock-ledge beside him.

"Isn't the tide coming in very fast, Mr. Kerrigan?" said Merle at his elbow.

He looked round with a start. "It is so, Miss Merle—coming in at a terrible rate. That is, it's what you might call a fine tide, a fine *flowing* tide," he said, correcting himself with a congratulatory emphasis, as if the fact he stated were, under the circumstances, an eminently gratifying one. But Kerrigan was slenderly pro-

vided with histrionic gifts, and Merle at once perceived how matters stood.

"What shall we do if a boat doesn't come in time?" she said.

"In time? Why, Lord love you, ma'am, where in the world would they be that 'ud hinder them in coming in plenty of time? Sure we'll see Sir Ben back here in a brace of shakes, or else some of the fishing-lads. Oh, time enough, bedad. And besides that the tide's about at its height now—or next door to it. Faith, I'm not sure but it's turned already." Here, as if to refute this glaring misstatement, a hissing crest broke about his ankles, drenching him to the knee, and making him stagger on the slippery rock. He perforce shifted and gave ground. "I was just gathering up a few big stones, ma'am, that might be convenient for keeping your feet drier, though indeed it is scarce worth while, with Sir Ben close by. . . . I see you've been reading the lad's letter, Miss Merle?"

"Mr. Kerrigan," said Merle, suddenly, "did Johnny Day never speak at all of his people at home?"

Kerrigan deemed it so desirable to keep her thoughts safely occupied in the antipodes, that we may fear his poverty of invention, rather than

his regard for strict veracity, withheld him from at once launching into copious reports of Johnny Day's confidences. As it was, he replied hesitatingly, "Let me see now—I remember one day, when he was about dead beat, and I was bidding him come on, he said to himself like, 'If it wasn't for the chances of getting back to her, I'd just stay where I am, and be done with it all.' So I said to him was that his mother? And he said no, she'd been dead this many a year. But whoever it was, he meant what he said, I'm pretty sure, for by that time he'd got past caring for living for living's sake. Bedad, there are some whiles when nothing seems foolisher than keeping alive at all costs, if you just consider the matter reasonably."

"That's quite true," said Merle, considering how keeping alive could in her own case be justified by no chance of "getting back."

"Not that I was meaning anything in partic'lar," Kerrigan hastened to add. "We've no call to be thinking about living or not living either; he'll be here directly."

"But I was," said Merle. A bluster of wind swept by, sown with fine rain-pricks and salt-tasting spray, and a sliding wave clattered the stones which Kerrigan had collected. Almost at the same moment, however, he uttered a shout

of joyful surprise. "Here he is—here he is himself in the boat, Miss Merle—God knows I'd never thought we'd set eyes on him again. Ah, but he's only got the bit of a little punt—well, no matter for that, 'twill take you grandly, and 'twill be all right, any way."

As he spoke a tiny boat began to emerge from the mist, the merest dwarf of a craft, curiously cramped and truncated in structure, and allowing but scanty room for even two passengers.

Merle saw it with a sort of despairing anger. The prospect of a rescue had hitherto, as it were, fended off the full weight of the alternative from bearing upon her. But now that this alternative seemed to be swept out of her reach, she felt as if fate had mocked and betrayed her. She would after all be haled back into the hard, cold desolation of recurrent, weary days, the very threshold of which was darkened by a miserable conflict between justice to the living and loyalty to the dead. As this hurried through her mind, she turned to Kerrigan, and said passionately, "I know you will not let me have a chance, because I'm not a man."

He did not misunderstand her, but was almost as much shocked as if he had done so. "Goodness guide us, Miss Merle, what should the likes of you want with any such chance?" he said. "If it was me now, that's alone in the world—

but *you*. Why, it's no sort of notion for you to take—it's—it's downright unreasonable," he averred, casting about for an adequate expression of dissent. "You've plenty of people, Miss Merle, that wouldn't like to hear you say such a thing. And there's Sir Ben calling to you," he added, as a conclusive argument.

"Merle, I say, Merle, are you there all right?" shouted Sir Ben, over whom a waft of the fog had drifted.

The sound of his pleasant, familiar voice came to her as harshly and hatefully as if it had been the grating open of a dungeon-door. She turned away, and stood with interlocked fingers gazing down and down into the huddling welter of the waves. A desperate irresolution whirled about and shattered her thought. But the decision was taken out of her hands. She had dropped the sheet of paper, and now a gust snatched it up. She saw it fluttering away, out of her reach, with Dion's handwriting upon it, and she made a quick movement to reclaim it. In doing so she set her foot on a floating mat of weed, which had no rock beneath it, and in another instant water and sky reeled and rushed loudly together above her head, while amid that hollow roaring she was drawn down, far and far beyond hearing of any call, into depths that would keep Dion's counsel very safely.

AFTER THE STORM

An Act of Expiation—A Scapegoat—Contrariness—Praying Backwards—Kerrigan's Plan—Once More Rejected—He Loses His Quality—A Bad Character—The Widow Nolan's Watch

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER THE STORM

A WEEK later Glenore was lying in the apricot-coloured sunshine of a waning afternoon, mild and still, with the softness of April in air that would soon drink the cordial beams of May. If you had looked into nooks under overshaded walls and banks, you might have seen drifts of young green leaves, and snapped-off sprays, with powdery tassels and crinkled buds, fresh yet, but doomed never to unfold; and very high up along the beach were heaped great loads of sea-wrack, which had been flung down there noiselessly amid thunderous plunging and darkly amid seething snows. These were the chief traces remaining visible of the wild work that wind and tide had made for a night and a day and a night after the return of the ill-fated expedition from Inish Cloghawn. Other traces there were which would not be soon obliterated; and it is improb-

able that you could have listened to any five minutes' conversation in Glenore without coming upon some reference to the storm. It cropped up every now and then in the talk of several neighbours, who had been drawn into a knot near a rough boarded shanty at the rear of Mack's shed, by the sounds of unusually energetic hammering, which proceeded therefrom.

They were caused by Paddy Mack, who was battering his bicycle to pieces with a heavy sledge. He had meditated this act ever since he started on his frantic race home from Murrish Point, where, by bad luck, the little cockle-shell of a punt was the only boat to be found; but until to-day he had not met with an opportunity for carrying out his purpose. Now every clanging thump that he dealt the machine seemed to lighten the burden of guilt laid upon him by the tragical consequences of his blunder. He felt as if he were wreaking a righteous retribution upon himself, and at the same time annihilating an object which would have evermore spoken reproachfully to him of his ill-deserts. Not that Paddy's remorse had been heightened and confirmed by much censure on the part of his neighbours, who chose through some illogical reasoning of their own to hold another person responsible for the disaster.

"Whethen now, if that isn't himself goin' the road there," remarked Mrs. Carroll, suddenly, "stumpin' along as bold as brass—or I dunno but he looks somethin' discouraged like. I hadn't seen him out since."

Himself was Martin Kerrigan, who just then passed slowly along the lane.

"Be the saints above, he's got his good coat on him," said her sister Nannie. "Sure, now, he wouldn't ever be going up to the Big House? He might have the impidence in him of a prize pig and a rigiment of horse dragoons, and not have the face to show himself there after what all he's after bringin' on the Quality, the Lord pity them."

"No thanks to him there wasn't twice the destruction there is in it," said Hugh Brady, who had a knack of executing his road repairs in places where something was going on. "Stevie Devlin sez that if it wasn't only for their boat happenin' to come up the minute it did, neither of the two of them—his Honour or Kerrigan—'ud ever have been seen sight of agin. And as for his Honour, if it hadn't been that by luck the life was near drownded out of him when they pulled him on board, they'd never ha' got him home alive or dead. For Stevie sez that when once he began to come to himself a bit, 'twas every ha'porth they

could contrive to keep him from leppin' out on them into the say."

"Sure, small blame to him, the misfornit poor young gintleman, and himself scarce better than a slip of a boy," said Mrs. Carroll, "after beholdin' his life's comfort swallied up that way before his eyes. Ah, sure, 'twould annoy them that are nothin' to her at all to think of the roll of the wather above her head, she that was a pleasure to see just passin' down the street. God be good to her, but it's a cruel pity for the both of them."

"He's young yet," said Nannie Doherty, "He might get over it after a while. 'Tis harder on Molly Nolan, that's lost the heart out of the world, you may say, along wid poor Dan ; and she wid a houseful of little childer."

"Is she down on the beach yet?" said Barney Mack, as he returned from ascertaining what his hammering nephew was at. "'Twill be a bad job if she takes to mopin' about there continual ; nothin' 'ud likelier turn her demented in her mind. And as for any chance of his comin' ashore, wid the tide runnin' out strong the way it was that night, there's twenty to one agin his ever bein' heard of, or poor Miss Merle either."

"Ah, dear, but it's a terrible lonesome thing never to come to a buryin'," said Nannie. "There's some sort of consolement in that ; but when people

have to think of the width of the say, it's a throuble widout an end to it, no more than the win' and the waves. It might ready enough drive a body distracted."

"Well, her boy Andy's more sensible like than you might expec' of him," said Mrs. Carroll, "for when he can't persuade her indoors any other way, he goes and sets the young ones bawlin' mad; then she'll come in, the crathur, in a sort of maze, but at any rate she pacifies them and bides aisy herself for a bit."

"Begorrah, people has need of all the sense they can keep together to contend wid the conthrary way things get regulated," said Mrs. Gallaher. "Look at a hard-workin' dacint man like Dan Nolan tuk and drownded on his widdy and childer, and an ould naygur like himself yonder, that nobody 'ud miss if he was under all the says from this to the North Pole of Chiny, to be comin' back wid niver a hurt taken no more than if he'd had himself done up in a rush-casin' like a fresh salmon. And look at a lovely young lady like Miss Merle, wid everythin' in the world to contint her, there she is swep' away like a wisp of ould weed, and Norah Caffrey, that's as good as half dead and buried these times untold, she's left lyin' hand and fut as helpless as a log of wood, year out and year in, till you'd be tired on'y of thinkin' of it."

"'Deed, then I wouldn't go for to be evenin' the likes of any such an ugly-tempered ould little-good-for as Kerrigan with poor Norah Caffrey," objected Nannie. "If she's not able for aught, 'tis no fau't of hers, and she'd do anybody a good turn if she could, I well know. And if there was nothin' else, she sez a dale of prayers."

"Oh, *prayers*——" said Hugh Brady, and appeared to suppress some further comments. "But, bedad, if Kerrigan tuk to that work, it's apt he'd be to say them backwards, according to his black-lookin' gob."

"It's a fortnit thing that them ill-wishin' sort of folk'll be mostly haythenish in their minds," said Mrs. Gallaher, "for if they got to prayin' agin other people, you couldn't tell but somethin' bad 'ud come of it."

"Musha, sure, prayin' agin people's nothin' better than a sort of cursin'," said Nannie, "and that's no harm to anybody except themselves that does it."

"I wouldn't say," said Mrs. Gallaher, "but some of them might be cute enough to sloother up the mischief they were manin', so as 'twouldn't be aisy for any one who didn't know the ins and outs of it all to see what they were drivin' at, and might slip in that way. They'd do nobody a benefit, anyhow. I'd liefer they let it alone."

"Och, woman alive, I dunno but that's a quare sort of talk you have," said Mrs. Carroll.

"And I declare to goodness he is takin' the turn up there," pursued Mrs. Gallaher, waiving the questions of the inconveniences arising from misapplied piety. "Well, tubbe sure, if I'd been after enticin' out the young lady to get drownded, not to spake of his Honour that came as near it as anythin', I'd have the dacint feelin' in me to not go flourish meself in the Quality's faces, as if I thought they wouldn't hate the sight of me. Faix, it's raison they have to be sorry they ever tuk up wid him at all. Little likely we are to see a one of them comin' about Glenore agin in a hurry, and I on'y wish we could say the same of Kerrigan himself—set him up—and he stravadin' about as if the whole place belonged to him."

Kerrigan actually was bound for the Big House, though not in the overweening mood of which his neighbours suspected him. His frame of mind, indeed, was rather curiously in accordance with what they would have considered appropriate. He did not, of course, take their extreme view of his own culpability, nor had he heard those views expressed with unrestricted freedom, but he felt himself indefinitely blameworthy, and he was fully conscious that Glenore eyed him more askance than ever since the misfortune which had fallen

upon his Quality. The apologetic tone of his retainers, Micky Losty and the Widdy Dempsey, who in duty bound stood upon the defensive, would by itself have assured him of this. When the Widdy, as she scooped a hole for his tea-kettle among the fibrous glow of his turf-sods, said argumentatively, "Sure, as I was sayin' to Mrs. Gallaher this mornin', if people knew beforehand everythin' that was goin' to turn out conthrary, they'd be apt to never stir hand or fut at all at all for 'fraid of misfortins. And for the matter of that, there's plenty of harm might aisy have happened the crathurs if you'd never thought of takin' them out in the ould boat," Kerrigan gave only his usual stinted attention to her remarks, but their general purport reached him and scarcely roused a protest in his disconsolate thoughts.

Yet, despite his uneasy, semi-remorseful feeling, he had set out this afternoon to pay a visit at the melancholy Big House. He was impelled to do so by his knowledge that he must not hope to find any more favourable opportunity for an interview which he anxiously desired with Sir Ben. For Quality's flitting was now no longer merely a bit of unauthorised gossip. They were going on the next day but one, and had only so long postponed their departure from the scene of their sorrow because Lady O'Connor had been made genuinely

ill by the sudden shock. Kerrigan's object was to unfold a plan which for some little time had been growing in his mind. Late events had grievously maimed and marred it, but he clung to the hope that he might still stave off the dreaded parting. He felt by no means confident of success. The more he tried to prearrange his arguments effectively, the more confused and unready he found himself, and as he walked on alongside the shimmering lough and under the flickering greenery, he remembered with increasing distinctness that autumn garden years ago, where he had made his bootless attempt to lure his sister Maggie from her convent retreat. The reminiscence seemed to him an evil augury.

He found Sir Ben haggard and harassed and disposed to talk about irrelevant topics—the weather, and the crops, and the prospects of a European war, so that Kerrigan had to make an opening for himself—a sort of thing over which he commonly bungled.

"And so you're leaving us on Thursday, sir?" he said.

"Well, yes, I think Lady O'Connor will be quite able to travel by that time," said Sir Ben with a perceptible accent of relief; "she is a great deal better, and wishes to get away."

"The place will be uncommonly lonesome

without you all, if you intend to go out of it for good," said Kerrigan, looking at his boots.

"Oh, of course, we're very sorry to go," Sir Ben said, hurriedly, "and I hope we shall see you again some time or other. But it is impossible for us to keep the place any longer, as I explained when I wrote to you the other day. And I know very well, that as it is you must have had an exceedingly bad bargain in letting it as you did."

"I'll tell you what I was thinking in my mind," said Kerrigan, abruptly, but he hesitated long enough to prove that he found the disclosure of his cogitations a difficult matter; "what I was thinking is this—you see, sir, I'm a well-to-do sort of man; in fact I've got a considerable lot of money—what with one thing and another, it comes to something not much under nine or ten thousand a year, or maybe more, over and above the value of the block of land, and house and that—you see, sir?"

Sir Ben made a vague sound of assent, wondering a little what was coming next.

"And the devil receive the good it is to me, or has been to me," Kerrigan continued, "except maybe in the matter of getting this old place, and you being agreeable to stop in it. By jingo, if that's all coming to an end now, and there's

to be never a sight of one of you about, or a creature to speak a pleasant word to one from morning to night—the Lord knows the day seems twice its own length before it's fairly begun—why, I might as well chuck every penny of it into"—he was going to have said "the sea," but that being a terrible subject, he substituted "to the dogs."

"But this is what I've been considering, Sir Ben," he went on, stammering and staring harder at his boots, "if by any sort of—by any manner of means—you'd maybe make up your mind to settle down in Glenore, and stop on here in this house, whatever way you might please—and the place to be fixed up whatever way her ladyship might fancy, and everything kept up as it ought to be, stables and all, and you just to give your orders, and the money there ready to hand—what else is the use of it? And the understanding to be that the whole concern is yours out and out, once I skip—and that it would be, sir, every penny of it, for there's not a soul in this world that I'd better like to leave it to or that 'twould gratify me more to see spending it. That's a fact. So perhaps you'd consider the idea. Sure enough, I thought one time things might be a deal more agreeable than ever they can be now. But if

you think you could accommodate yourself to settling down here, it mightn't be too inconvenient for you altogether, with horses plenty, and carriages to get about. And as for me, it's been a different place since you were in it; I'd miss you woeful—and I could make my will to-morrow, if you don't think too bad of it."

The presentiment which had accompanied Kerrigan on his enterprise was not to be discredited. He had happened upon the very unpropitious moment for his proposal when Sir Ben, who had hitherto gone "as one that had been stunned," was just awakening with a sense that to travel away somewhere, the further the better, and to work hard amongst new scenes and faces, was the only endurable prospect remaining. Hence the words "settle down in Glenore" were the part of Kerrigan's not very lucid statement which immediately arrested his attention and seemed to suggest a repugnant impossibility. He hastened to put it out of the question.

"Thank you, Kerrigan, it's awfully good of you to want to keep us as your tenants, but we have to go. It's probable that I may get an appointment in the diplomatic service before autumn, and that would take me abroad. But I hope that we'll meet again one of these days. You ought to run up to Dublin sometimes."

"You needn't be afraid that it wasn't all come by right and on the square—the bit of money that I was talking about leaving you," said Kerrigan, seeking a possible explanation for Sir Ben's complete ignoring of the proposed testamentary dispositions, "if that was what you're thinking of, Sir Ben. My uncle made his pile at the sheep farming straight enough. There was never anything against him barring his queer temper, poor old sinner. And you might come in for it before so——"

"My goodness, no, Kerrigan," said Sir Ben, considerably taken aback, "such an idea never occurred to me, of course. What I meant was that it's not possible for us to stay any longer in Glenore. Thank you all the same. The fact is that I must find something to do, and—and get away from here."

In his eagerness to disclaim any disparaging conjectures about Kerrigan's family, Sir Ben spoke with a convincing vehemence, and Kerrigan, recalling more and more vividly his bygone rejection by Maggie, accepted another repulse. "I see, sir; I understand," he said; "we'll say no more about it then. I'm sorry, that's all. But I won't bid you good-bye now, for I'll belike see you off on Thursday. It's only the way I thought it would be, so it is."

As he went home through the spring sunshine, Kerrigan did not think much about his failure. A sort of heaviness that was both physical and mental kept him from scrutinising his trouble, though he felt it all the while as one feels a fog in the dark. He walked along slowly and slouching, and when he had passed Mrs. Pat Losty's door, she remarked: "Laws bless me, but that Kerrigan's growin' to be won'erful ould-looking. To see him slingein' about, all gathered up like, you might say he was the age of everythin', the divil's cure to him. Biddy, you little imp of the mischief, if you go for to be spillin' me suds on me, I'll give you to Mr. Kerrigan to take home wid him, and he's a terrible wicked man."

But Kerrigan did not after all bid his Quality good-bye on Thursday morning. At sunset of the evening before, as the new-made Widdy Molly Nolan was standing on the shore very close to the glistening edge of the falling tide, the Widdy Dempsey ran down the beach to her in a shawl-fluttering hurry and caught her by the arm. "Ah, Mrs. Nolan, dear," she said, "for pity's sake come up quick wid me to the house. Mr. Kerrigan's tuk powerful bad this day; what ails him I dunno, but he's not able to stir hand or fut wid the awful pains have a hould of him,

'IT REACHED OLD CONEYHOLME JUST AS [illegible]

and shouts terrific if a body offers to come next or nigh him. Off his head like he seems to be too every now and then, so I run down to see could I get any knowledegable person to him. Mrs. Carroll tould me I'd find you here, and I left me poor father mindin' him that's not able for much himself. Ah, come along, there's a good woman, and maybe you might know somethin' that 'ud aise him a bit, for it's past me, and he's miserable to behold, the crathur."

Molly looked blankly across to where the west was opening "chambers brighter than the rose," beyond a level of rippled silver and liquid opal, and she murmured something indistinctly about "watching."

"But come then, Mrs. Nolan, jewel," said Mrs. Carroll, who had followed, "sure, don't you see the tide's all slipped away now, and you've been out standin' on your feet the len'th of the day? 'Twould be a charity, you that have such a way wid sick people."

And Molly turned slowly from the sea and went with them.

COMING BACK

Convalescence—A Reaction—"The Crathur"—At the Low Wall—Rory and Sir Ben—Changes—Kerrigan's Difficulty—He Accepts a Proposal—Corney Nolan is "as plased as not"

CHAPTER XV

COMING BACK

MOLLY NOLAN was a born nurse, and she now found ample scope for the exercise of her gift. For Kerrigan, victimised, no doubt, by his drenching and long row in wet clothes a few days since, had fallen into the racking clutches of a rheumatic fever. The slow weeks lengthened out from spring to early summer before it began to relax its grip, and things sometimes looked as if his life would go with it. Kerrigan often wished very heartily that this might be the case, and he as often, and almost as sincerely, regretted that it had not so happened, after he had at last crawled down, a grizzle-bearded, stiff-jointed skeleton, to the dull little empty parlour. His convalescence was a dreary time, with exceedingly few incidents calculated to make existence seem a possession worth such a painful struggling back. It promised little and yielded even less. He had looked forward

slightly to reading his newspaper again, but the sheets rustled tempestuously in his shaky hands, and the print swam into dots and specks before his dazzled eyes. A somewhat better resource was Molly Nolan's talk. Under ordinary circumstances she was not a loquacious person, but her natural genius showed her intuitively when a long monologue in narrative form would prove soothing to her patient, and Kerrigan got through some hours the less heavily by virtue of her soft-toned soliloquies about the latest events in the social history of Glenore. The Widdy Dempsey's higher-pitched voice excruciated him, and had been interdicted in terms which caused her to do her waiting in ostentatious dumbness. Molly herself gained by her devoted nursing an occupation which drew her mind off her own engrossing trouble, and this perhaps proved more valuable to her than the handsome payment received from Kerrigan, who was admitted since his illness to have much reformed his ould naygurly ways. In fact, the Widdy Dempsey's supersession as the person at the head of affairs was softened to her by the more liberal scale on which the Lough Farm housekeeping nowadays was done.

But Kerrigan gave a more generally popular proof of his new open-handedness on the occasion of Norah Caffrey's death, which occurred rather

suddenly about midsummer, when he was just creeping back into contact with the outer world. On Norah's parents in their penury the dread of a workhouse funeral weighed sorely, until Kerrigan, hearing of the matter from Molly, provided funds for a "rael respectable buryin'," and delivered little old Juggy and her crippled husband from a bitter aggravation of their grief. This charitable deed, taken in conjunction with his broken-down, enfeebled aspect, caused a certain reaction in his favour among the inhabitants of Glenore. When he began to be seen again crawling along the road, the women were more apt to say "the crathur" than "cock him up"; and the men who met him said, "And how's yourself, Mr. Kerrigan? I hope you're gettin' your health somethin' better now." They would have pursued the conversation further if he had given them any encouragement, but he had neither energy nor spirits to break through his old tongue-tied custom, though he listened to Molly Nolan's account of their affairs with some interest, which he occasionally evinced by asking a question. More often he sat mute and made no sign. Molly reported that he moped terrible, and hadn't as much stren'th left in him as 'ud strike a match. She doubted would he ever be anythin' like the man he was agin. Dr. Meade, too, looked solemn

at some of his symptoms. Glenore's general opinion of the case was that he'd never see next Christmas. The first touch of hard weather'd kill him off like a sick fly. The poor man hadn't the look of one that 'ud hould up his head long in this world.

People were inclined that summer to gloomy forecasts. It was a wet, unprosperous season, with illness and other bad luck more than usually rife, and Quality's departure made a blank where blanks could ill be afforded. In some shallow-bound lives a very small external interest may be the half-inch of water which will keep a boat's keel from rasping on the shoal-rock. The O'Connors had vanished utterly. No trace of them reappeared, except a note on business to Mrs. Hanlon from Mrs. Lawson, who said that the family were well, and that Sir Ben was going abroad. Mrs. Hanlon replying, mentioned among other things that Mr. Kerrigan had come near dying, and wouldn't last much longer. The medical men had no opinion of him at all. He was just fretting himself to fiddle-strings after Sir Ben, that used to be such company to him, and everybody missed the family out of the place.

Up at the Big House the grass and weeds began to flourish rampantly over the walks and flower-beds, and old Corney Nolan cast magpieish eyes

upon a bit of new ornamental trellis-work which had been put up on the porch of an old arbour in the shrubbery. He thought it would do grandly for one side of his fowl-house, and there it was only going to loss, with nobody to notice it. When the weather was dry enough Kerrigan would make his way painfully of an afternoon up to his old point of view, at the low wall overlooking the lawns. He sometimes sat there for a very long while, silent and alone.

He had gone thither one day late in September, when the wind through the branches sounded like rain falling, because the drying leaves pattered and rustled sharply. They had scarcely yet begun to change colour; only the horse-chestnuts were flecked with shaded orange and scarlet and crimson, and a golden crest showed here and there among the deep green boughs of the elms. The sunshine flashed in and out fitfully, and the breeze had a keen edge. As he looked across the shivering grass towards the old grey house Kerrigan was thinking that he would not come there again. Each time he found it harder to drag himself so far, and the pleasure which he derived from the sight of his deserted demesne was a strictly melancholy one.

"I'll make a shift to get that piece of business fixed up off my mind," he said to himself.

"'Twill have to be done before I'm taken bad again, if it's to be done at all; not that it's any great matter, maybe, one way or the other. Things seem to come to much the same in the end, whatever you do or let alone. If they could have been hindered of ever beginning, there'd have been some sense in that." He turned his head and looked back down the road along which he had come; he was sombrely meditating upon his weariful tramp home to his cheerless room, and the tedious lagging evening, and the long night with its tattered coverlid of uneasy sleep. Just then he felt something brush against his foot. It was a shaggy iron-grey head with a broad grin, and it belonged to Rory the terrier, who still regarded himself as Miss Merle's property, and looked for her hopefully in unlikely places. And a few steps behind came Sir Ben.

Kerrigan started up with a quicker movement than he had made for months past. "And is it yourself, sir?" he said; "why, I heard you'd gone to foreign parts. I never looked to see you in these diggins again."

"Oh, I heard you were knocked up, and, by Jove, it seems I was better informed," said Sir Ben, "so I thought I'd run down and see how you were getting on before I left this country." He had thought of it long and dubiously before

he could make up his mind; but now in sight of Kerrigan's wrecked frame and delighted countenance, he felt glad that his reluctance to face Glenore again had been overridden by his resolve. "What have you been doing with yourself, Kerrigan?" he said. "I declare I'd almost have passed you by on the road."

"Och, all manner of devilment," said Kerrigan, indifferently; "the doctor says the rheumatics have got hold of me somehow inwards, and might make an end of me off hand and permiscuous any of these days. It's no great odds."

"Plenty of odds," said Sir Ben; "but you know these doctors often talk unmitigated stuff."

"And how are all the family, sir?" said Kerrigan. "So you're going to travel?"

"All well, thank you. Yes, I'm pretty sure to get that appointment, and if so, I'll be off to the East next month. It won't be half bad. I've always had a hankering to see something of those places. And you? Do you intend to stay on here?" he said, checked by an uncomfortable conviction that Kerrigan's abode in any given place was likely to be of a brief duration.

"I might as well be here as any place else," said Kerrigan, dejectedly; "I've nothing that makes it any partic'lar differ where I stop. There's just one bit of business I'd like to get

settled up, but I don't know if I'll find it easy to manage."

"Perhaps I could do something to help?" said Sir Ben.

"You see, it's about this bit of property I have," said Kerrigan. "I've a sort of notion that I'd like as well as anything to fix it so as it might be some manner of benefit to them folk below there"—he pointed down the leafy road—"for it's uncommonly little to me. I can't say if they're good for much—they may be or they mayn't; most people aren't—but beyond a doubt, whoever's fault it is, some of them haven't the life of a dog."

"They have not, sure enough," said Sir Ben, throwing a stick for Rory.

"There's a deal of things might be done about the place, if they had anybody to spend the money on it," said Kerrigan; "there's that breakwater contrivance, that they say 'ud keep them from drowning by dozens—the way Dan Nolan lost his life in the spring. They've materials for it handy enough all about, the Lord knows; and 'twould give a sight of employment, that, and the wet bog yonder at the bay's head; it might be drained without much botheration. Anyway, it 'ud be something if anybody could make out somehow so as the beings might have

a dacint-sized scrap of land apiece, instead of to be setting their pitaties among the litters of stone, or you may say in the shingle itself. Mrs. Nolan was telling me that the Gallahers had two drills swept clean away out to sea the last rough spell that happened. Then the houses are another thing. Some of them cabins look liker an old clay bank that's weathered into hollows than a place for human cratures to be livin' in. A few new ones 'ud do no harm."

"Of course there's no end to what might be done for them, poor souls," said Sir Ben, rather absently. He was wondering at the change in Kerrigan's sentiments, which were even more strikingly transformed than his appearance. For, shrunken and aged and shattered as he was, his talk still less than his looks matched that of the Kerrigan of five months ago, who had been wont to express a decided opinion that his neighbours' niggard portion in life fully equalled, if it did not exceed, their deserts.

"I think about it and make up plans in a sort of a way at night and other odd whiles," he went on now. "It's as good an idea for getting through the time as considering how blamed uncomfortable you are, and minding what an uncommon fool you've been, or expecting you're just going to die. But the first thing I've got

to do is to get the property fixed up somehow so that it will be used for what I said, whether I'm to the fore or no. If I don't have it down in black and white, it's bound, once I quit, to go to some people whose fortunes I've no fancy to be making; my word, no—a nasty-tempered, grasping screw she is as ever got into a man's house, and her brats 'ill be the moral of herself. I'd sooner chuck it into the lough there than think she'd be fingering it. Ay, there wasn't a one of them but Maggie, and she doesn't want it where she is."

"Well, the lawyers would settle all that for you without much trouble, I should think. I suppose you'll have to appoint trustees or something of that sort," said Sir Ben, on whom the resentful gleam in Kerrigan's sunken eyes made a very melancholy expression.

"But there's another affair won't be as easily fixed, I'm afraid," said Kerrigan. "Some sensible person there ought to be living here to see after everything. I don't want it to be all put off till after I drop down. I might last this goodish while yet—longer than I want; but I'll never be fit for much again, that's certain," he said, looking ruefully at his own claw-like, tremulous hands. "I get liker an old machine with the screws rusting out of it every day that goes over my

head. And I don't know where you'd look for the right sort of man. A deal would have to depend on him, and it might ruinate the whole concern if a rascal was put in it. There's plenty such knocking around, just waiting for a chance."

"Oh, you'll find some one fast enough," said Sir Ben. He was picking up small stones from the top of the wall, and throwing them to Rory; he would have thrown them all the same if they had been little gold nuggets, for he was thinking hard of something different.

"Do you happen to remember, sir," Kerrigan said, after a pause, "what she was talking about that day out there on those God-forgotten little rocks? About the poor people not getting fairity, and about giving them a better chance of what's going—and so on? Sure, she hadn't any notion —how should she?—of the way things in the world are mixed up, and the devilment that's in them. But maybe that mightn't hinder her having the sense to see right enough that they'd be better managed somehow different. Anyhow, it was thinking of the way she said she'd like to have them regulated that put it into my head to consider could it be contrived at all. I don't know but it might to some extent, if there was anybody to lend me hand. . . . The worst of it is," he went on, having sat awhile in despondent medi-

tation, "that I don't get along pleasant, to say mostly with people. And somehow I can't abide the thought of a stranger in there. We'd be apt not to hit it off at all. Take to quarrelling perhaps, and I might better be lonesome than that. God knows I'm not up to anything, and that's the truth."

"You and I used to get on together all right," said Sir Ben.

"Ay, ay, we did so," said Kerrigan; "but where am I to find the likes of you?"

"It might be better," said Sir Ben, "if you tried the thing itself."

"You don't mean it, Sir Ben," said Kerrigan, turning on him a look curiously shot with flickering hope, and half-angry rejection thereof, and persistent hope again—"you don't mean to say that you'd come back here right away to live—and stop in Glenore for good—'twould be the making of everything, if you could bring your mind to put up with it. But I forgot, you're going abroad. It 'ud have been the greatest comfort at all—but sure you didn't ever mean it?"

Sir Ben was silent for a minute. He looked at the heavy, green boughs, swinging slowly to the faint autumnal breeze, which ruffled the withered grass, and at the old solitary house

standing among them, with the older and more solitary sea behind it. No live things were in sight, except a black-shawled Widdy Drennan, and her brindled goat, which she was rather ostentatiously hunting off its accustomed straying ground to its more meagre pasturage on the roadside. It was all quiet and still and grey, an every-day scene with a touch of decadence. But across this glinted a vision hot and bright, vivid with oriental light and colour, and redolent of romance old and new; a vision that glowed and faded and receded, until it left him confronting a gaunt face that looked and listened for his answer with the forlornest pretence at unconcern.

"I did mean it," said Sir Ben.

"Then I'll die content," said Kerrigan.

"I hope so," said Sir Ben, "all in good time. But you've got a long spell of work cut out for you first. And if I were you I wouldn't sit here in this wind. It's getting cold."

They walked back together to the farm, between the hedges shining with vermilion rose-hips and the beaded gloss of blackberries, along by the blinking lough margin, and past the row of mellow-thatched roofs. In Glenore rumour flies swiftly, and before the rose-petal cloudlets of that evening's sunset had blanched from pink

to white, many of the inhabitants had heard a report which gave them some satisfaction. It reached old Corney Nolan just as he was lighting his pipe with a blue-headed match and a crisply curled deal-shaving in Mack's shed. "Bejabers now," he said in comment, "I'm as plased as not if they're comin' back. Not but what there's a sartin convenience sometimes in havin' things left to themselves for a bit—however, it's lonesome like we've seemed this good while. Och, sure they'll be welcome, and I wouldn't say that much for every one of their sort. Bedad, no, there's plenty of them I'd be long sorry to see a sight of comin' about a place. But sure there's as much difference in Quality as in sound and rotten pitaties. Sorra the harm there is in these ones. Troth, we'll do right well if nothin' worse ever comes to Glenore than Kerrigan's Quality."

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